

DEMOCRATIZING

LESSONS FROM HURRICANE MITCH RECONSTRUCTION

DEVELOPMENT



WOLA

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DEMOCRATIZING LESSONS FROM HURRICANE MITCH RECONSTRUCTION DEVELOPMENT

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Democratizing Development: Lessons from Hurricane Mitch Reconstruction is a document that was developed collaboratively through a participatory learning process generously funded by the Ford Foundation. The process entailed writing an initial draft of the document and then traveling to Central America to discuss it with selected civil society representatives in Honduras, Nicaragua and El Salvador, and representatives from international non-governmental agencies. In addition, an Advisory Committee consisting of representatives of collegial non-governmental organizations, and WOLA board and staff members provided input to the document. Their insights, comments and critiques were incorporated into a second draft that was later distributed and discussed during a series of roundtables held in Central America in February 2002 to a broader audience of civil society representatives (NGOs and social movements) and international representatives based in the region and Washington, DC. The rich contributions of the roundtable participants were woven into the final draft presented here. While any errors can be attributed to the author, the wealth of lessons entailed herein could not have been drawn out without the contributions of so many Central Americans whose lives are affected daily by the grave social, economic and environmental problems facing the region.

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Executive Summary

Hurricane Mitch struck Central America at the end of October 1998 causing enormous damage and loss of life, particularly in Honduras and Nicaragua. Nearly 30,000 people were killed or disappeared, and 1.5 million displaced. There was widespread agreement among bilateral and multilateral donors, Central American civil society organizations and international non-governmental organizations that the extent of the damage was exacerbated by the considerable environmental degradation and chronic poverty that existed before the storm.

In spite of the devastation and human tragedy wrought by Hurricane Mitch, new opportunities also emerged from the destruction. Rebuilding the old Central America, one filled with poverty and despair, was neither desirable nor advisable. Instead, transforming the region with the active involvement of civil society became a priority. Opportunities materialized for civil society to influence the reconstruction and development policies of the Central American governments so that they would reduce previous social, economic, and environmental vulnerabilities, and to encourage institutional reforms to strengthen the fragile democracies and increase respect for human rights. Bilateral and multilateral donors' agreement that a transformative reconstruction strategy was needed in the Consultative Group meetings of December 1998 and May 1999 partially created these opportunities.

Democratizing Development: Lessons from Hurricane Mitch Reconstruction is a document that examines the roles of civil society in the reconstruction process, identifying the internal and external factors that facilitated or inhibited their ability to participate in and shape policy debates. It also examines the role of international groups (such as non-governmental agencies and private foundations), their relations with their Central American counterparts, and how future collaborative work can be improved. The paper attempts to evaluate the extent to which national and international non-governmental organizations were able to influence the reconstruction plans and policies of the

bilateral donors, multilateral development banks, and, ultimately, the national governments. Last of all, the paper endeavors to define the successes of and lessons learned about civil society engagement with the international donor institutions.

There were some important successes both politically and organizationally in the post Hurricane work. Central American civil society organizations had unparalleled levels of participation in the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) sponsored Consultative Group meetings. They learned more about how international financial institutions (IFIs) operate, and they refined the skills required for engaging with IFI representatives. After years of polarization and operating individually in each country, many civil society organizations began the process of working together to elaborate common platforms and positions. Finally, they achieved national and international recognition from governmental and non-governmental organizations alike. There were also important improvements in the coordination between Central American Civil Society organizations and international NGOs. Strategies targeting the donor community were designed and implemented collaboratively, and information shared. These hard fought gains were won despite limited financial and human resources, internal debates on the strategic priorities for national coalitions, overly centralized and intransigent governments, and an entrenched economic development model.

Yet Central American civil society organizations were not as successful in policy terms, in changing legislation or altering development policies. The landmark Stockholm Accords have yet to be implemented. The post-Hurricane work offers important lessons that can be used to promote future progress in advocacy efforts:

- 1 National civil society organizations must broaden their representativity and work toward greater institutional decentralization. Doing this will increase their legitimacy, strengthen the effectiveness of their message, and improve the potential for greater impact on the local level.
- 2 Civil society groups must maintain existing and build new relationships with the bilateral and multilateral donors, analyzing donor interests more clearly in order to develop their advocacy campaigns.

- 3 Civil society organizations should work on developing more concrete policy objectives with which to petition both governments and the donor community. They should consider developing advocacy campaigns targeting municipal and national governments around the concrete policy objectives.
- 4 International non-governmental organizations should continue to help Central American civil society organizations access the official donor community to present policies and projects, and help them pressure the official donor community to direct aid for vulnerability reduction projects.
- 5 International non-governmental organizations should also increase efforts to link Central American counterparts with experts around specific policy objectives in different sectors.
- 6 North and South civil society groups should consider regular meetings to determine how to incorporate advocacy work in the day to day programs, and how to continue support for ongoing advocacy training and implementation of strategies.
- 7 The international donor community should consider disbursing aid based on continuous evaluations on progress in targeted areas designed to reduce poverty and environmental degradation.
- 8 The international donor community should also encourage governments to implement a process of ongoing dialogue with civil society organizations on the appropriate development models for each country.

Civil society organizations in Honduras, Nicaragua and El Salvador exerted a tremendous amount of effort in the three years following Hurricane Mitch to advocate for transformative reconstruction and important successes were achieved. With the ongoing disasters facing Central America and the worsening economic panorama, Central Americans must continue to advocate for alternative sustainable development projects that can reverse the dangerous course down which the region is heading. The lessons learned from this study are one step toward that effort.

Table 1: Impact of Hurricane Mitch

	Deaths	Disappeared	Homeless	Wounded	Bridges Destroyed or Damaged	Homes Destroyed or Damaged	Road Networks Destroyed (km)	Losses in Dollars	% of GDP lost	% damage to principle crops
Honduras	7,079	10,072	1,960,000	11,762	169 destroyed 71 damaged	171,378 destroyed 147,912 damaged	800	\$3,308,000	59.8%	90% of banana crop
Nicaragua	2,394	7,000	865,700	287	71-80 destroyed 81 damaged	16,543 destroyed 14,000 damaged	1,275	\$1,382,000	65%	30% of banana crop
El Salvador	239	135	67,300	—	3-15 destroyed	18,000 destroyed 10,000; damaged	1,998	\$1,000,000	7.9%	18% of basic grains

Sources: PNUD 1999 Human Development Information; State Department

PAHO Summerics 1999

WHO World Health Report

USAID Hurricane Reconstruction Special Objective

Central American Integration System

INSARG – International Search and Rescue Group; Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs

I. Introduction

Background

Hurricane Mitch struck Central America at the end of October 1998 causing enormous damage and loss of life, particularly in Honduras and Nicaragua. (Table 1). Nearly 30,000 people were killed or disappeared, and 1.5 million displaced. The extent of the damage was exacerbated by the considerable environmental degradation and chronic poverty that existed before the storm. Some experts classified the Mitch Tragedy as the biggest environmental denunciation of the last few decades and, in Honduras, there were some who interpreted the flooding as the rebellion of the rivers.

With generous pledges of support from international donors, Central Americans set out to rebuild in 1999. The exposed environmental degradation and extreme poverty of the region¹ dictated that reconstruction could not be simply rebuilding what had existed before. Instead, the situation called for transformation by creating the structures and systems to mitigate the damage from future natural or man-made disasters. It also called for reducing the poverty and the environmental exploitation that had made the region so vulnerable. The recognition of these points demanded new thinking and new approaches to reconstruction and development. Given this opportunity, Central American governments and civil society groups, bilateral and multilateral donors, and international NGOs sought to intervene in and shape reconstruction priorities and programs in light of their own goals and ideology.

Three years later, much of the damaged infrastructure of Central America has been repaired. There are the beginnings of early systems to warn populations of impending natural disasters and prepare for them. There are also nascent efforts to relocate housing and other

¹ The degree of vulnerability is determined by the relationship between the level of risk, the local capacity and certain living conditions of the threatened population. (Ordóñez et al, 1999).

Ongoing Disasters in Central America

On January 13 and again on February 13, 2001 earthquakes struck El Salvador. In the first earthquake, 844 people were killed and there was over \$1.2 billion in damage. In the second, an additional 315 people died and over \$348 million in damages. One fifth of the population was directly affected and everyone was impacted by the ongoing tremors that continued for months. By July, those living in poverty rose by more than 225,000 and fifty thousand jobs were lost, contributing to a chronically high unemployment rate.

Six months later, most of Central America was ravaged by a drought, placing nearly a million people in positions of extreme food insecurity. Deaths from starvation were reported in Nicaragua, El Salvador and Honduras. Grain crops were lost and electricity prices rose due to lack of rainfall. The situation was exacerbated by the fall in coffee prices, placing thousands of people out of work. In Honduras, 50,000 permanent employees were laid off and 150,000 seasonal employees, dependant on this work for their annual income, were without employment. In El Salvador and Nicaragua, 65,000 and 200,000 people were affected respectively. Major sources of livelihoods were lost. Over 52% (7.1 million) of the region's population are poor and chronically food insecure. (Source USAID 9/01).

buildings from vulnerable areas. But regional economies have changed little and poverty continues to be severe. Governments have barely begun to institutionalize the fight against corruption (a problem that can be considered a constant man-made threat) and have only reluctantly begun dialogues with civil society groups on themes they consider their areas of expertise.

This Study

This report examines the roles of citizen participation in the reconstruction process, identifying the internal and external factors that facilitated or inhibited the ability of citizen groups to participate, and to develop and implement advocacy strategies in order to influence the reconstruction policies. Participation is defined not only as representation in official meetings but also the ability to present proposals and influence outcomes at various levels over a period of time. Advocacy work is defined here as meeting and lobbying legislators, the executive branch, and the international donor community on policies and funding related to development. Advocacy work is seen as a process that also takes time.

This document also examines the roles of international groups (such as non-governmental agencies and private foundations), their relations with the Central American counterparts, and how future work together can be improved. Further, it begins to assess the extent to

which national and international non-governmental organizations were able to influence the reconstruction plans and policies of the development banks and donors², and, ultimately, the national governments. Last of all, the paper tries to evaluate the gains and lessons learned from civil society engagement with governments, and bilateral and multilateral donors, and seeks to use the lessons to enhance current advocacy efforts underway in Central America.

The document is broken down into two main parts. The first provides a chronology of the major activities and events from the time Mitch hit Central America in October 1998 to the last regional Consultative Group meeting in Madrid in March 2001. The second section addresses the questions previously mentioned and analyzes the advocacy work as a whole.

It is important to point out two other facts about this study. First, while it is true that Hurricane and Tropical Storm Mitch affected all countries in the Central American Isthmus, this document focuses on Honduras, Nicaragua and El Salvador. Honduras and Nicaragua are included because, they were the two countries most affected by Hurricane Mitch. El Salvador is included because of the UNDP's unique role and how it influenced other actors in the reconstruction process. The analysis and lessons learned, however, are applicable to the other countries. Indeed, it is hoped that it is applicable to all countries where civil society organizations are trying to influence the policies of their governments and the donor community.

Secondly, the study does not focus much on the conduct of the Central American governments.³ The governments of Central America played key roles in the reconstruction process. In fact, in our view, the responsibility for the failure of the reconstruction process to be truly "transformative" rests largely on the shoulders of these governments. A full evaluation of their role is needed; it is simply outside the scope of this document.

² Donors are understood here as official funding from countries, or otherwise referred to as bilateral donors.

³ In 1998, when Hurricane Mitch occurred, the Central American presidents were: Alvaro Arzú (Guatemala), Carlos Flores FacussÉ (Honduras), Armando Calderón Sol (El Salvador), Arnoldo Alemán (Nicaragua) and Miguel Angel Rodríguez (Costa Rica). All of their terms have since ended.

The goal of this study is to enhance the advocacy work of Central American civil society organizations and international organizations, both together and individually, in the region. Although Mitch occurred over three years ago, this document is timely and very relevant. Central America is experiencing ongoing natural disasters such as the earthquakes in El Salvador at the beginning of 2001 and devastating droughts six months later. (Box 1A).⁴ The promises of transformation after Hurricane Mitch did not occur despite the governmental rhetoric of the last three years. Central American aspirations for just and sustainable development have not yet been met, and the region continues to be at risk for future catastrophes and the consequences of a deepening economic, environmental and political vulnerability.⁵

Hope for the Future

Civil society groups had some important successes both politically and organizationally in the post Hurricane work. Central American

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civil society organizations (CACSOs) enjoyed unparalleled levels of participation in the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) sponsored consultative group meetings. They learned how international financial institutions (IFIs) operated and the skills required for engaging with IFI representatives. After years of

polarization and operating individually in each country, civil society organizations came together and began the process of working together to elaborate common platforms and positions. Finally, they achieved national and international recognition from governmental

⁴ The region is particularly exposed to seismic activity, volcanic eruptions, hurricanes and tropical storms, landslides, flooding and droughts.

⁵ Central America is one of the most regions most prone to natural disasters. According to information from the Office of Foreign Disasters Assistance (OFDA), between 1960 to 1992, this region suffered 75 events that were classified disasters. (Ordóñez et al, 1999).

and non-governmental organizations alike. These hard fought gains were won despite limited financial and human resources, internal debates on the work foci of the national coalitions, overly centralized governments, and an entrenched economic development model.

This work must continue in order to strengthen the voice of Central Americans in promoting sustainable development policies that address issues of social and environmental vulnerability. Challenges and opportunities face the region, including the likelihood of natural disasters (such as the earthquakes in El Salvador)⁶, the move towards decentralization and the implementation of poverty reduction strategies in Honduras and Nicaragua make it imperative that CACSOs increase their ability to strengthen their critique of existing development strategies, refine their proposals for alternative policy, and enhance their capacity to influence donor and national governments. The lessons learned that are extracted from this study are one step toward this goal.

⁶ The two earthquakes that occurred in El Salvador with hardly a months difference (January and February, 2001) confirm the fears of the people that the traditional cycles of seismic activity have changed. Technically, they have believed that the repetition of these types of activity occurs every 40 years for those of major intensity, and shorter periods for those less intense. The same occurs with the biggest floods. In Honduras it was calculated that the "llenas" or greatest floods historically have occurred every 20 years, but after Mitch there was at least one big flood in 2001 that affected five out of the eighteen departments.



II. The Opportunities Presented by the Reconstruction Process

Within weeks of the Hurricane, it was evident that rebuilding Central America would be an enormously difficult and expensive undertaking, requiring billions of dollars in grants or loans from private, bi-lateral, and multi-lateral donors. It also became evident, as donors and the development community prepared to assist the region's rebuilding, that donors were talking about reconstruction in new ways. Several shared assumptions were reflected in the donors' discourse:

- 1 That existing conditions of extreme poverty, substandard housing and environmental degradation in Central America exacerbated the Hurricane's impact, increasing the loss of lives and the magnitude of the crisis. These conditions would have to be addressed in the reconstruction process because simply rebuilding the status quo would only result in similar destruction with the next disaster.
- 2 If rebuilding the ex-ante conditions was not an option, then what was needed was a strategy for a transformation of Central America. Transformation in turn implied the need for a long-term commitment by the international community to rebuilding the region. It was on this consensus that the landmark Stockholm Agreements were developed in May 1999.
- 3 That existing bilateral and multilateral debt in Honduras and Nicaragua were unsustainable requiring substantial debt relief from international donors in order to help the Central American nations rebuild.
- 4 That the governments could not continue operating in a closed and centralized fashion but must involve civil society in the rebuilding of the country at the local, regional and national levels.

These shared assumptions were echoed in the press as well. "Poverty is the deadly difference that manufactures such vulnerability. Anywhere it struck, Mitch would have been deadly. But only

poverty can explain why it was so deadly.” So stated a Washington Post editorial on November 4, 1998, as Hurricane Mitch subsided into a tropical storm.

By all indicators, Central Americans had high levels of poverty prior to October 1998. (Table 2). People were living in substandard

“Poverty is the deadly difference that manufactures such vulnerability. Anywhere it struck, Mitch would have been deadly. But only poverty can explain why it was so deadly.”

housing, had little access to education or health care, and were either unemployed or underemployed. For example, 1997 statistics demonstrate that 2.6 million Hondurans out of a population of 6 million and 2.1 million Nicaraguans out of a population of 4.7 million were living below the poverty line. In Honduras, there was a housing deficit of over 700,000 houses. The level of environmental degradation is

alarming. According to the IDB, deforestation in the Central American region is occurring at 388,000-451,000 hectares per year (45 hectares per hour) and existing forest cover has been reduced to 38% of total land. (CCAD-1998). More explicitly, researcher Susan Stonich⁷ states that “rates of loss of forests, soils, fisheries, and other crucial natural resources exceed rates of regeneration and that ensuing consequences such as land degradation, watershed deterioration, and destruction of coastal resources have reached critical areas...” Hurricane Mitch simply exacerbated these conditions.

The response of the international community was generous. The swift international relief response was in the form of material aid for immediate needs, and debt relief. For example, the Mexican Government provided helicopters to aid in rescue operations. Australia provided \$US 1 million in relief with a focus on medical supplies,

⁷ Susan Stonich is a faculty member of the University of California Santa Barbara campus in the departments of Anthropology and the Environmental Studies Program. Her studies have focused on the human and environmental consequences of economic development with the globalization of capital.

Graphic 2: Socio-Economic Statistics for each Country

	Population	Per Capita GDP	Unemployment and Under-employment	% of people living under the poverty line	Infant Mortality Rate (per thousand births)	Housing Deficit	Adult Illiteracy Rate	Health Expenditure per capita/ doctors per 100,000 citizens
Honduras	6 million	Less than \$810	6.3% unemployment	65%	40	800,000	22%	\$210 every year/ 83 doctors per 100,000 citizens
Nicaragua	4.7 million	\$438/year	16% unemployment; 36% under-employment	75%	50	400,000	26%	\$150; 86 doctors per 100,000 citizens
El Salvador	6.2 million	\$2,013/year	8% unemployment; 30% under-employment	45%	28	551,000	21%	\$228; 9.1 doctors per 10,000 citizens

Sources: PNUD 1999 Human Development Information; State Department PAHO Summeres 1999
 WHO World Health Report
 USAID Hurricane Reconstruction Special Objective
 Central American Integration System
 INSARIG – International Search and Rescue Group; Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs

health care and water sanitation. The US carried out the largest US food airlift to the region and provided \$291 million in humanitarian assistance. Finally, the European Union made a donation of \$35 million for emergency relief.

Not only did the international community respond to immediate physical needs, they responded to the financial problems and showed some flexibility. In terms of debt relief, the United Kingdom called for a suspension of foreign debt service payments by Central American governments, and proposed the creation of a World Bank debt

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service trust fund, called the Central American Emergency Trust Fund (CAETF), to which the funding institution contributed \$16 million. On November 18, 1998, the US announced that it would grant a two-year moratorium on debt payments from Nicaragua and Honduras (for a total of \$56 million) and

encouraged other bilateral donors to follow suit. Germany also placed a moratorium on debt payments from both countries that together totaled over \$25 million and Spain provided \$60 million in debt relief for Honduras, Nicaragua, El Salvador and Guatemala.

The Multilateral Development Banks also responded quickly to avert potential economic and social collapse that may have resulted from Central American governments' failure to service the multilateral debts. For example, the World Bank helped the Nicaraguan and Honduran governments by providing balance of payment support that allowed them to purchase and import materials needed for reconstruction, and by setting up and coordinating the CAETF mentioned above.

International non-governmental organizations responded generously during and immediately following the Hurricane as well. In Honduras, for example, 48 Spanish NGOs and 12 Italian NGOs provided much needed emergency goods and medical support.⁸ Oxfam Inter-

⁸ Sally O'Neill, Troicair.



national members responded through direct relief efforts on the ground and in support of local community organizations. Catholic Relief Services, American Friends Service Committee, Christian Church Aid, Dans Church Aid, Troicaire, Forum Syd, Solidaridad Internacional, among many others, provided essential personnel, medical supplies and materials.

By most accounts, the Central American Governments proved to be the least responsive and effective during the emergency. President Arnaldo Alemán flatly refused to call a state of emergency, claiming that damage reports and loss of life from the La Casita volcano landslides (where 3,000 people were killed) was a propaganda ploy by the opposition Sandinista mayor. In Honduras, President Carlos Flores Facussé did declare a state of emergency but soon thereafter stripped the Permanent Emergency Contingency Commission (COPECO) of its responsibilities for the delivery of the disaster relief. It simply was not prepared to deliver aid and, in fact, was charged with blocking aid to the communities. Consequently, Flores authorized the delivery of relief assistance to go through the churches. In El Salvador, the ARENA government politicized the humanitarian assistance in order to enhance their image prior to the elections through distributing aid to undecided communities and slapping on the ARENA slogan.

In the absence of effective government ministries, civil society organizations and church groups used their existing networks to

coordinate aid distribution at a local level and clear away the wreckage. For example, in Honduras, Caritas Honduras, Caritas España, and ASONOG (the Association of Non-Governmental Agencies) were instrumental in distributing aid to communities using their extensive local networks. Other impromptu groups, such as women and students, united to clear the streets of mud and debris in Comayagua, Honduras. In the Lower Lempa region in El Salvador, residents demonstrated the importance of community organizations in mitigating disasters through previous disaster preparedness trainings.

A final and significant part of the immediate response included an emergency Consultative Group meeting in Washington, DC on December 10-11. In the meeting, Central American governments reported initial damage estimates, and donors pledged initial aid (for the emergency and the reconstruction) and established a trust fund to resolve immediate problems of debt servicing. Governments also presented “wish lists” of projects for funding. The projects were developed by central governments without input from civil society.

The meeting was significant because the bilateral and multilateral donors responded to the civil society groups’ call for participation in the development of the national reconstruction proposals. The donor countries repeatedly questioned the lack of civil society participation in the development and prioritization of projects, and urged the Central American governments to develop more inclusive reconstruction plans with broad participation. The initial tone of this meeting also raised expectations that the reconstruction after this latest disaster might somehow be different from the historical trends and that a real transformation could take place. Donors reiterated that reconstruction plans had to include strategies for strengthening democratic institutions, reforming government branches such as the judiciary, and developing environmental protection policies. It also established the framework for the post-emergency work by strongly advising governments to work with civil society on the aforementioned themes. This was an extraordinary opportunity for civil society organizations and their allies. When the Central American governments failed to adequately involve civil society in all its diversity, the loosely formed network of organizations that worked together during the emergency coalesced into national organizations.

III. Chronology of Advocacy Work Post-Hurricane Mitch Emergency Phase

Rise of National and Regional Networks

At the close of the December CG meeting, the donors scheduled the next meeting for May of 1999 to take place in Stockholm. At that meeting, the Central American governments were to present reconstructions plans and donors were to make pledges. As the Central American governments prepared for the CG, they were not inclusive of civil society in the development of the proposals to be presented in Stockholm. Consequently, organized Central American civil society groups formed national coalitions to represent their constituencies' positions before the government, bilateral donors and the multilateral donors. They embarked on a parallel process of broad consultation with citizen groups and communities to develop alternative reconstruction and transformation proposals to present at the Stockholm Consultative Group meeting. They started a separate process because they had no faith that the governments would welcome civil society or their perspectives. The national coalitions that formed are the Espacio Interforos in Honduras, the Coordinadora Civil para la Emergencia y Reconstrucción in Nicaragua, and the Foro de la Sociedad Civil in El Salvador. The region-wide coordinating body that later formed to unite the national level groups was Centro America Solidaria (CAS). The objectives of the national organizations as well as the regional one were not only to develop the proposals but also to conduct advocacy campaigns to influence the reconstruction development policies of the governments and donors. To carry out this work, they received financial and technical support from international non-governmental agencies and foundations.

In Honduras, the *Espacio Interforos*(Interforos) was formed in February 1999 by 12 forums and networks. Currently, sixteen national

networks are members of Interforos, representing, non-governmental organizations such as ASONOG, Caritas Honduras, children, youth, women, ethnic groups and sector groups such as FOSDEH and FONAMIH. (For a full list of member organizations, see Annex 1). Interforos prepared a reconstruction plan titled “De la Tragedia a una Nueva Honduras” (From Tragedy to a New Honduras) that was distributed in Stockholm and internationally. Its vision was to “consolidate a political space for civil society that analyzes and optimizes human development processes through national and international advocacy with the goal of achieving a real national transformation with equity.” (Interforos brochure).

In Nicaragua, the *Coordinadora Civil para la Emergencia y la Reconstrucción* (CCER) also formed in the days immediately following the hurricane. There are over 19 networks in the CCER representing over 350 organizations that focus on issues of concern to women, children and youth, environmental groups, NGOs, the agricultural sector and housing groups. (For a full list of member organizations, see Annex 2).

Civil society started a separate process because they had no faith that the governments would welcome civil society or their perspectives.

The specific objectives of the CCER were to guarantee a space for negotiation and participation in running the country, and to promote a national, sustainable development policy that would overcome the vulnerabilities in which the majority of Nicaraguans live. The CCER developed a reconstruction

proposal distributed at the Stockholm Consultative Group meeting. It also carried out two social audits on the emergency relief and reconstruction process, and publicized the results. As the major national NGO working on reconstruction, the CCER eventually became a member of the government created organization National Committee on Economic and Social Policies (CONPES).

The *Foro de la Sociedad Civil para la Reconstrucción de El Salvador* (Civil Society Forum for the Reconstruction of El Salvador) formed in March 1999 and was the principle interlocutor for communities

affected by Mitch. (For a full list of member organizations, see Annex 3). The Foro emerged along side a process facilitated by the United Nations Development Program. The UNDP process involved bringing all actors together to develop and prioritize sector specific reconstruction plans. It developed a national plan for reconstruction that both the Salvadoran government and the Foro de la Sociedad Civil supported. It was also through this process that Salvadoran civil society was invited to participate in the official delegation to Stockholm. The proposal included projects in the Lower Lempa River Valley area as well as projects favored by the government. The Foro would also attempt to play a key role in the Salvadoran reconstruction processes after the January and February 2001 earthquakes.

Regionally, the coordinating body for the reconstruction process was *Centro América Solidaria* (CAS – *Central America Solidarity*)—whose origins stem from a regional NGO meeting in Tegucigalpa in April 1999. The purpose of this meeting was to prepare a regional response in preparation for the Stockholm meeting. The CAS formed, in part, due to the common social, economical and environmental problems plaguing the region but also in response to the IDB and the government support for regional integration of Central America. The CAS members were the national coalitions (Interforos, CCER, the Foro de la Sociedad Civil) and the Guatemalan Coordinator of NGOs and Cooperatives of (CONGCOOP), and Red Alforja and Costa Rica Solidaria. All were involved in post Mitch recovery and reconstruction work. In 2000, CAS became a more formal body and developed a regional development document presented at the regional Consultative Group meeting in March 2001.

Accompanying the emerging national coalitions were several international NGOs (INGOs) that came together in response to openings perceived after the December 1998 Consultative Group meeting. These include: the Washington Office on Latin America (WOLA), Oxfam America, Oxfam International⁹, Catholic Relief Services, Forum Syd, Save the Children Sweden, Intermon, Troicair, Solidaridad Internacional, CONGDE of Spain, and American Policy Group of

⁹ Oxfam International is the coalition of the eleven Oxfams such as Oxfam America, Intermon, Oxfam Great Britain and Oxfam Belgium. Forum Syd is a coalition of five Swedish organizations including Diakonia and Save the Children.

Canada. The majority of these organizations address issues of sustainable development, food security, debt relief and human rights in Central America. The INGOs were committed to helping the Central American counterparts lobby donors, develop proposals and monitor the influx of aid as well as to lobbying their own governments on aid levels and the reconstruction process. Many of these international organizations' work over the last two years was made possible by private foundations such as the Ford Foundation. The Ford Foundation also directly funded the national coalitions in the region in an attempt to support the CACSOs' ability to promote alternative development policies. Other international organizations, such as the American Friends Service Committee, also provided support to the national coalitions.

Over the course of three years, the advocacy work of civil society and the INGOs focused on and was shaped largely by three processes: the five Consultative Group meetings, the governmental follow-up mechanisms created after the Stockholm Consultative Group meeting in May 1999, and the World Bank & International Monetary Fund poverty reduction strategy initiatives.

Meetings and Follow-up Mechanisms

After the 1998 Hurricane, the IDB organized five Consultative Group meetings between donors and Central American governments that were potential influencing opportunities. These meetings were focal points for developing proposals and lobbying the bilateral donors and multi-development banks. The first Consultative Group meeting was the Emergency Consultative Group meeting on December 10-11, 1998 in Washington, D.C. The next four consultative group meetings were in May 1999 in Stockholm, February 2000 in Tegucigalpa, May 2000 in Washington DC, and the regional Consultative Group meeting in March 2001, in Madrid.

As mentioned earlier, in December 1998, the donor community urged the Central American governments to develop reconstruction strategies with the participation of civil society organizations. The strategies had to include disaster mitigation plans and government reforms. The governments would then present their proposals six months later at the Consultative Group meeting in Sweden.



In the six months following the December emergency Consultative Group meeting, the CACSOs prepared alternatives to the reconstruction proposals being developed by the governments. The member organizations of each national network elaborated different sections of the proposals based on their area of expertise and obtained input from their base. The final draft documents were then presented to the broader membership in assemblies for their comments and feedback before sending the proposals to the press in preparation for Stockholm. In each case, there were sectors of the coalitions who thought their needs were not adequately addressed in the main document, so they developed their own documents that were later inserted into the final documents or distributed separately. This was especially the case of women's groups in Nicaragua, El Salvador and Honduras, as well as for ethnic organizations on the Atlantic Coast of Nicaragua.¹⁰

In the weeks preceding the Stockholm Consultative Group meeting, CACSO representatives met with bilateral and multilateral donors in the region and abroad to press them to adopt the civil society initiatives. For example, a delegation from Interforos and the CCER traveled to Washington and met with the IDB, the WB, the Euro-

¹⁰ The theme of Gender and Development is not well developed in Central America, even after the impact of Mitch. The women's organizations had to fight for space; not only physical space but also regarding the content for the different CG meetings. Inequalities cause women to be more vulnerable to the impact of disasters than men.

pean Commission, and USAID. The objectives were to present the positions of civil society, to win the support of donors, and to get the donors to use their influence with Central American governments to adopt the civil society proposals.

The INGOs supported the CACSOs both logistically through financial support and arranging meetings, and technically by providing expertise on the lobbying efforts and written documents. The INGOs also directly lobbied their governments and the multilateral development banks. Finally, they arranged public forums for the delegates to update people on the ongoing conditions in the region as well as to present their proposals in Washington and the European capitals.

The Stockholm meetings in May 1999 were the next potential influencing opportunities and, like the earlier Consultative Group meeting, significant in many ways. There were two meetings in Stockholm; the first a conference of INGOs and CACSOs, immediately followed by the official Consultative Group meeting. Swedish NGOs with the support from the Swedish Foreign Ministry began organizing the conference titled the International NGO Gathering on Central America in February. At first, the idea of the meeting was controversial. Swedish organizers called the conference the parallel meeting to the Consultative Group meeting, and saw it as an opportunity to exchange ideas on reconstruction strategies in workshops, to prepare for the official meeting, and influence the donors. The Central Americans objected to this conception for several reasons. First of all, they argued that by the time they reached Stockholm, the donors would have already made their decisions. Secondly, labeling the meeting a “parallel” one implied that they were isolated from the official meetings. Last of all, a meeting in Stockholm would be expensive and limit Central American civil society participation.

After much discussion, it was decided to go ahead with the conference and use it as a springboard for their participation in the official meeting that followed. The regional meeting in Tegucigalpa in April 1999, worked to shape the agenda for the conference. Subsequent discussions among INGOs and Central American groups fleshed out a conference plan. The overall goal was to push for civil society participation in the reconstruction and transformation process rather than to support specific development plans.

Out of the conference, the NGOs produced a declaration and a set of recommendations. [Annex 4] The NGO Declaration called on the Central American governments to include civil society in the reconstruction strategies in order to meet the challenges facing the region, and urged the donors to condition the aid to guarantee transformative reconstruction. It also declared civil society's intention to strengthening their efforts to "influence Governments of the North and of Central America to include the priorities of civil society and to guarantee a real and effective participation of women, indigenous and black people, youth and disabled people among others ensuring equitable treatment in development and cooperation policies." Finally, it urged all the actors to reach agreement on the formulation, implementation, follow-up and evaluation of the regional and national plans, policies, programs, and projects.

The recommendations that came out of the NGO conference were elaborated in workshops that focused on vulnerability, transparency, decentralization and local development, and on the foreign debt and economic policies. In the recommendations, they argued that action taken towards the reduction of the multiple vulnerabilities would be effective only if:

- 1 The planning and implementation mobilizes a variety of actors, both from the government sectors and from civil society in all its diversity (ethnic, gender, generational and physical ability) towards a new mode of working together with the international co-operation.
- 2 There are formally defined institutions for the follow-up and evaluation of results, and the reports of the activities mentioned above and the institutions are structured properly in cultural and technical terms, as well as in terms of human resources.
- 3 There is a deepening of the empowerment of local actors in the economic and social network, with an effective decentralization for a balanced development.
- 4 The reduction of the overwhelming burden of the foreign debt leads to real opportunities for funding development through adequate exchange mechanisms, which links debt relief forums with cooperation organizations. (NGO Gathering on Central America, May 24, 1999).

The participants also stated their political commitment to guaranteeing an equitable participation of women in all levels of decision, planning, implementation and evaluation of the projects, programs and initiatives that result from the Consultative Group meeting. Significantly, representatives of the INGOs and the CACSOs read and distributed the civil society Declaration and recommendations in the official meeting.

Also unprecedented was a smaller meeting between civil society representatives and the donor community at the end of the NGO conference. For the first time, civil society met across the table from donors to present proposals prior to the official Consultative Group meeting. Along with the CACSO representatives, participants included representatives from the US and two European Networks such as Eurodad. Donor community participants included representatives from the USA, Sweden, Spain, Germany, Canada, and Denmark and from the multilateral institutions, the UNDP, the World Bank, the European Community and the IDB. The meeting provided the civil society groups the opportunity to discuss the failure or success of the consultative process donors had demanded of the governments. They also presented the results of the conference and their proposals. The donor representatives expressed general support for the proposals and concern at the lack of civil society participation in the development of the government reconstruction plans. For example, a World Bank official expressed support for the civil society proposals in principle. The German Minister of Finance, on the other hand, stated that the lack of meaningful consultation processes in Nicaragua and Honduras was a problem for the donors and encouraged his colleagues to address it with the governments in the official meeting.

During the official meeting, the donors pledged over USD \$9 billion for Central American reconstruction; \$3 billion more than the initial pledges made in December. The pledge amount included monies already spent during the emergency phase, new funds, and reprogrammed funds. The discourse of the meeting was as impressive as the aid promised. The IDB President, Enrique Iglesias, proclaimed, "reconstruction must not be at the expense of transformation." He urged the Central American Governments to improve in areas of transparency and accountability, decentralization and participation, environmental protection, poverty alleviation, and to strengthen the

democratic institutions to protect human rights. Other inaugural speakers again urged the Central American governments to involve civil society in reconstruction efforts, building on the “very active involvement of such groups during the hurricane emergency.” (Swedish Foreign Ministry).

Along with the plenary sessions, the agenda included three workshops on “Transparency and Good Governance”, “Ecological and Social Vulnerability”, and “Local Development and Decentralization”. Participants in the workshops included bilateral donors, development banks, government officials and the CACSOs. Participation had originally been limited to members of official delegations. This limited civil society participation because the only countries that permitted NGO participation in the official delegations were El Salvador,

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Nicaragua, Canada, Britain, Sweden and France. Other civil society representatives were excluded, including people from the United States. Interforos was invited to participate in the official meeting only through the mediations of a Swedish government representative. It was assumed that only a limited number of people

would be able to attend the plenary sessions and workshops. But greater numbers of INGOs and CACSOs were able to participate than originally expected. This was important for two reasons. First of all the IDB and the governments responded to the presence of civil society groups constructively by expanding the number of participants. Secondly, and as a result of the greater participation, some IFIs and government officials began the process of overcoming their apprehension of dealing with civil society. Regarding the workshops themselves, civil society participants stated that they were too short, too general and highly academic. On the other hand, they provided a first opportunity to exchange ideas, position papers and opinions on these topics.

The Stockholm Consultative Group meeting was historic because of the declarations and agreements it produced, and the level of civil

society participation. The Stockholm Declaration and Agreements [Annex 5] publicly committed both the Central American governments and the donors to a transformative reconstruction agenda. The Declaration's six objectives committed governments and donors to:

- ▶ Reduce the social and ecological vulnerability of the region as the overriding goal.
- ▶ Construct and transform Central America based on an integrated focus of transparency and good governance.
- ▶ Consolidate democracy and good governance, reinforcing the process of decentralization of governmental functions and powers, with the active participation of civil society.
- ▶ Promote the respect for human rights as a permanent objective. The promotion of equality between women and men, and the rights of children, of ethnic groups and other minorities should be given special attention.
- ▶ Coordinate the donor efforts, guided by the priorities set by the recipient countries.
- ▶ Intensify the efforts to reduce the external debt burden of the countries in the region.

Donors also pledged significant amount of aid for reconstruction (although they did not formally condition aid on fulfillment of the accords). They publicly promised to use the aid to reduce the structural problems of Central America. Moreover, partially acting on a recommendation from the north-south civil society representatives, they agreed to establish an oversight committee to help monitor the rebuilding and the implementation of the Stockholm Accords. The original oversight countries (commonly referred to as Group of 5 or G5) were Canada, Germany, Spain, Sweden and the United States, although the group was open to other bilateral and multilateral donors. Later it grew to include Japan, the IDB, and the WB, among others.

In direct response to the recommendations of the Consultative Group meeting, the Nicaragua and Honduran governments created civil society follow-up mechanisms to facilitate civil society participation in the reconstruction process. These were the civil society counterparts to

the G5, although without the same power. In Nicaragua, civil society would work through CONPES, the National Commission for Economic and Social Policies (*Comisión Nacional de Políticas Económicas y Sociales*). Formed prior to Hurricane Mitch in 1997, this commission had never really functioned. In Stockholm, President Arnaldo Alemán agreed to reactivate CONPES with the participation of the CCER. In Honduras, President Flores established the Civil Society Participation Commission (*Comisión de Participación de la Sociedad Civil*) in August 1999 by presidential decree.

The mechanism for civil society participation in El Salvador was unique. It was unique because the UNDP mission had been involved in leading a process that brought together civil society organizations, private sector groups, bilateral donors,¹¹ and national and international development organizations to elaborate the reconstruction proposal later presented in Stockholm. After Stockholm, the UNDP process developed a proposal for follow-up mechanisms to the Stockholm process. All the actors involved agreed on the proposal and the UNDP presented it to the government. However, President Francisco Flores never provided a formal response to the UNDP's petition for its endorsement. He claimed that as the democratically elected representative of the republic, he did not need to consult with civil society. Paradoxically, before assuming office, the president elect had sent a letter to the Stockholm meeting committing his administration to a open and participatory process. Thus, while donor and civil society follow-up mechanisms worked to various degrees in Honduras and Nicaragua, the mechanisms never really developed in El Salvador. Some analysts speculate that the Salvadoran government felt less need to respond to international donors' demands for participation mechanisms because the money pledged for El Salvador was far less than that pledged for Honduras and Nicaragua.

In September 1999, the representatives of the five donor countries met to establish its structure and operating mechanisms for their follow-up group. They hoped to be a catalyzing force for an open

¹¹ While bilateral donor representatives did participate, they reportedly did not have decision-making powers. It is therefore unclear the extent to which they actively supported the proposals of the UNDP or attempted to influence the Flores' government.

reconstruction process in each of the four countries most affected (the three in this study and Guatemala, although the latter later declined to accept any oversight). The groups agreed to meet every three months and to have a Secretariat Pro Tempore who would coordinate the meetings for a six-month term. Spain began as the Secretariat Pro Tempore followed by Sweden, the United States, Canada and Germany. Spain's coordination began in September and continued until the first country specific CG-meeting in Tegucigalpa in early February 2000. The secretariat was responsible for calling on and documenting follow-up meetings with the government and the donor community but did not have to call on the INGOs or CACSOs to participate in these meetings. This was because G5 considered coordination between the governments and civil society to be the responsibility of these parties. The secretariat was also responsible for providing a detailed report in the Consultative Group meetings. Finally, the G5 agreed to meet at a country level in order to respond to the realities of each country as well as on a regional level to oversee the regional issues.

For the monitoring and follow-up of the accords the G5 agreed to develop indicators on progress with their respective governments. Criteria for the indicators would be based on the principles stated in the Stockholm Declaration. The G5 also faced the challenge of figuring out how to turn the follow-up process into a regional one because regional integration was one of the main points discussed in Stockholm. This was and continues to be a challenge because Central American governments have not demonstrated an active commitment to regionalization nor did a functional regional institution strong enough to take on regional initiatives exist. Contributing to this challenge was the fact that the G5 members were more accustomed to dealing with country specific perspectives rather than with a regional one.

The G5 did not operate uniformly in each country, the reasons for which will be discussed in detail below. Where it did work, it was an important advocacy target for the INGOs and CACSOs, and was included in the advocacy strategies for the following Consultative Group meetings.

The next three influencing opportunities were the February 2000 Consultative Group meetings in Tegucigalpa, the May 2000

Consultative Group meeting in Washington D.C. for Nicaragua, and the regional Consultative Group meeting in Madrid 2001. The general calendar for the February CG and the Regional one was set in Stockholm. The purpose of the February CG was for each government in Central America to present a progress report on the reconstruction and implementation of the Stockholm Accords. It was not to pledge any additional funds. Separate sessions were planned for each country. Unexpectedly, the February CG only addressed Honduras, El Salvador and Guatemala. President Alemán postponed Nicaragua's participation claiming a previous engagement in Mexico. Most analysts believe that Alemán sought to avoid international pressure on a series of issues related to transparency and good governance

In the February meeting, the donors publicly applauded the three remaining CA governments for their progress in the reconstruction process, especially Honduras. In turn, Central American governments criticized the donors for the slowness in the distribution of aid pledged at Stockholm, citing this as the principle difficulty in moving forward with reconstruction. While it is true that there were still major unmet needs nearly a year and a half after the Hurricane, the governments were also unable to absorb large amount of aid due to lack of professional staff and structures to prevent mismanagement of funds.



Interforos and Foro de la Sociedad Civil representatives participated in the official plenary and in the workshops. Their participation paved the way for the CCER in Nicaragua to play a stronger role at the rescheduled CG for Nicaragua. Interforos criticized, among other things, the extent to which donor funding had gone to rehabilitate the physical infrastructure rather than establish the foundations for transformation that would reduce vulnerabilities. The Foro raised the concern that government did not support the UNDP process and was not open to civil society participation. In spite of this, the Central America governments received high marks from the donor community.

This was not the case for Nicaragua. The postponed Consultative Group meeting for Nicaragua took place in May 1999 and, in the end, its postponement turned out to be positive for the CCER. This was not only because the February CG had set a standard for participation but also because it allowed the CCER to better prepare for its participation. Before the meeting, a CCER delegation from Nicaragua met with bilateral and multilateral donor representatives to present the group's evaluation of the reconstruction process and suggestions for moving forward. During the meeting itself, civil society representatives from the CCER and CONPES were given time on the agenda to present its evaluations of the process to a broader audience. They criticized the lack of progress in areas of good governance, accountability and corruption citing the election law changes, the use of aid to build the presidential palace, and changes in the office of the Comptroller General that reduced the its ability to act independently. Further, they pointed out that the Government's vision of development has not changed to prioritize reducing social vulnerability.

The donors echoed the criticisms of the CCER and CONPES. They condemned the Alemán administration for its lack of progress on the implementation of the Stockholm principles, the lack of transparency, and bad governance practices such as the political pact between the National Liberal Party and the Sandinista Front for National Liberation (PLN, and FSLN) around elections¹² and the treatment of the former Comptroller General. The donors also forced a rewrite of a

¹² This pact reduced the number of political parties able to participate in the electoral process and provided National Assembly seats for the two leading party officials, Arnoldo Alemán and Daniel Ortega.

final statement whose draft applauded the Alemán Administration's progress in reconstruction, contradicting all that had been discussed in the official meeting. Even so, most of the donors failed to go the next step and formally condition aid to improvements in reforms, democratic practices, or reducing vulnerabilities.¹³

The last consultative group meeting was in March 2001. Originally scheduled for January, the IDB postponed the meeting until early March due to the devastating earthquakes that hit El Salvador in January and February. The purpose of this donor meeting was to review regional integration proposals developed by SICA (*Sistema de Integración Centroamericana*). In the May 1999 CG meeting, the IDB had identified SICA as the government-supported regional entity to develop integration proposals. Initially, the IDB argued that civil society participation was not necessary since only regional issues would be discussed. Furthermore, it was not to discuss reconstruction issues or progress on the implementation of the Stockholm Accords. This was not acceptable to CASCOS or INGOs who feared that the momentum generated from the Stockholm accords would be lost if governments were not made to provide progress reports on their implementation. Central America Solidarity (CAS) and the INGOs successfully petitioned donors abroad and in the region to include a review of the reconstruction process and implementation of the Accords. In November 2000, at the invitation of the G5, members from CAS and the INGOs were invited to travel to Sweden and meet with the G5 during their meeting to prepare for the Madrid Consultative Group meeting. The IDB, arguing that the Madrid meeting was a regional one, had not included any follow-up to the implementation of the Stockholm Agreements in the proposed Madrid agenda. The CASCOS and INGOs argued that the Madrid meeting must include government progress reports on the reconstruction in order to continue to hold the governments accountable and provide continuity to the reconstruction process. Members of the G5 pressed the IDB to include time for government reports in the agenda. This is significant because civil society organizations had never participated in a donor-planning session for a Consultative Group meeting before. Further, the G5

¹³ There were exceptions. The Nordic Countries did withdraw aid to Nicaragua due to Alemán's actions against the Comptroller and other issues of corruption.

had invited the CACSOs and the INGOs but not Central American government representatives.

During the Madrid meeting, CAS presented the regional reconstruction platform that they had prepared prior to January. Central Governments reported on the progress of the reconstruction and transformation. There was a high level of civil society participation at all stages of the meeting. A representative from CAS was able to respond to the government presentations and put forth the civil society view in the plenary session. Participation notwithstanding, in the Madrid meeting greater attention was placed on improving the potential for private investment by approving financing of regional infrastructure projects.

Debt

The Consultative Group meetings were major events that shaped the work of the CACSOs and the INGOs. On top of preparation for these meetings, a new element was introduced in the fall of 1999 that significantly affected the CACSOs work on reconstruction and follow-up to the Stockholm Accords. The new factor was the modification of the World Bank and International Monetary Fund's debt relief initiative. In 1996, the WB and IMF designed the Heavily Indebted Poor Country (HIPC) initiative to reduce the accumulated debt stock of the poorest countries in order to release them from chronic debt rescheduling and to ensure that the debtor countries were able to promptly service their debts. Three years later, only four of the 41 eligible countries were able to meet the complex conditions to be considered for debt relief.

Consequently, the banks introduced a modified version of the HIPC initiative at the summer 1999 Cologne Summit of seven industrialized countries (Group of Seven (G7)). The modifications included greater reductions in the total accumulated debt and quicker reductions in debt service payments. Most significantly for the purposes of this study, however, was the banks' mandate that governments receiving debt relief design a Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) with the consultation of civil society. This meant that governments had to design strategies with civil society participation

that would reduce poverty using funds that would have otherwise gone to debt service payments. This affected Honduras and Nicaragua, the two countries in the region with the highest multilateral and bilateral debts. Although there were several weaknesses with the initiative, it provided yet another opportunity to influence development strategies. One weakness was that neither the multilateral development banks nor the G7 conditioned future debt relief or future loans on demonstrating reductions in poverty. Instead, the relief was conditioned on the continuation of macroeconomic and structural adjustment programs.

Another requirement of a PRSP was that it be designed with Civil Society input, which effectively diverted the attention of CACSOs and INGOs away from work to ensure the implementation of the Stockholm Accords. The CACSO leaders argued that the reconstruction plans that they had developed for the Consultative Group meetings were poverty reduction strategies and so did not see the PRSP process as competing with the implementation of the Stockholm Accords. They quickly turned their attention to influencing the consultation procedures of the governments and, in the case of Honduras, developing their own national and regional poverty reduction strategies. A few of the INGOs that had played important advisory roles in the reconstruction process such as the Oxfams also moved towards supporting this effort. Undeniably, unsustainable debt service payments have prevented additional expenditures in health, education, nutrition, and other basic needs, and never before had governments been mandated to develop a strategy that would reduce poverty. At the same time, though, this represented a shift in the focus of the CCER and Interforos away from advocating for the implementation of the Stockholm accords in favor of -yet another promise for a just human and economic development.¹⁴

¹⁴The Honduran Civil Society proposals in terms of the debt, developed after Mitch, were never taken seriously by the multilateral organizations. Among the demands of ASONOG, FOSDEH, and Interforos, were: cancellation of 50% of the bilateral and multilateral debt before December 1999, and the other 50% in 2000. Further, that additional debt be concessional and debt servicing should be no more than 5% of the goods and services produced in the country, participation in structural adjustment policies and revision of the economic model, creation of a participatory social audit mechanism, and the creation of a national and international follow-up commission to the Stockholm Declaration.



IV. Analysis of Civil Society Advocacy Work in the Reconstruction Process

This section analyzes the gains of the post-Hurricane Mitch advocacy work, and the strengths and weaknesses of the actors involved. In addressing these points, it looks at the internal and external factors affecting CACSOs and INGOs ability to influence the reconstruction process and development policy through the development and implementation of advocacy strategies. Three years after the CG meeting, the Stockholm Agenda has not been fulfilled and, in fact, the standard of living for the majority of Central Americans has deteriorated. This analysis will attempt to provide insight as to why, despite so much promise, little was achieved.

A. Advocacy as a Strategy

When Hurricane Mitch struck Central America, civil society organizations in the region were dispersed, sector-specific, and had limited advocacy experience. Despite a demand for decentralization and redistribution of public resources, Central American civil society's own organizational structures tended to be centralized even if weak, with hierarchical decision making mechanisms, and little participation of women and youth. Communication mechanisms were weak and coordination amongst civil society actors was limited. The December CG meeting offered an opening to non-governmental actors to influence how reconstruction would occur. This required that civil society groups come together to alternative proposals for reconstruction, and advocacy strategies directed towards the Central American governments and the bilateral and multilateral donors.

Advocacy and lobbying are relatively new concepts to the region. Initially, they were viewed as the newest form of political struggle, moving from “la protesta a la propuesta” (protest to proposal).

Promoted by INGOs and foundations, this was a new and more sophisticated approach to change. It required that Central Americans gain new skills and additional knowledge. International NGOs such as Oxfam International, WOLA and Forum Syd were instrumental in providing information and advocacy training, and developing strategies with the CACSOs prior to the Consultative Group in Stockholm.

While civil society organizations accumulated experience in advocacy work over the course of three years, several points have become evident in the process. The first is that more discussion, debate and training on advocacy are required. There are different definitions and methodologies for advocacy work. WOLA's Advocacy Training Team based in Central America defines it as a series of political activities designed to influence policy and decision makers at the local, national and international level to improve the daily lives of people. Oxfam America and the Advocacy Institute have the following working definition of what is advocacy:

Advocacy is the pursuit of influencing outcomes—including public policy and resource-allocation decisions within political, economic, and social systems and institutions—that directly affect people's lives. Advocacy consists of organized efforts and actions based on the reality of "what is." These organized actions seek to highlight critical issues that have been ignored and submerged, to influence public attitudes, and to enact and implement laws and public policies so that visions of "what should be" in a just, decent society becomes a reality. Human rights—political, economic, and social—is an overarching framework for these visions. Advocacy organizations draw their strength from and are accountable to people—their members, constituents, and/or members of affected groups.

Advocacy has purposeful results: to enable social justice advocates to gain access and voice in the decision making of relevant institutions; to change the power relationships between these institutions and the people affected by their decisions, thereby changing the institutions themselves; and to result in a clear improvement in people's lives.¹⁵

¹⁵ Cohen, David et al.

In both definitions, advocacy work is political and purposeful. It entails a series of organized activities to change public policies in order to improve the day-to-day lives of people. The organized activities involve engaging with institutions that make policy and allocate resources; the government ministries and legislators, bilateral donors and multi-lateral development banks.

In the three years following Hurricane Mitch, it was evident that people in Central America held very different conceptions of what advocacy work entails. For some, advocacy work is presswork. For others, it is grassroots organizing and capacity building in order to have broad based support similar to the massive demonstrations in the 1980s. Very few understood advocacy work as it is defined above. Without a doubt, civil society organizations need to build their base to be stronger and to be representative. They need to publicize their positions in order to influence public attitudes. However, neither of these tactics will result in change if they are not accompanied by

Advocacy work entails a series of organized activities to change public policies in order to improve the day-to-day lives of people.

directly engaging those who make the decisions on political priorities and how public funds are to be spent.

Because there are multiple needs, it was difficult to reach a common definition of what advocacy work entailed. Underlying the different conceptions were debates on how to use effectively the

limited skilled and financial resources available plus widespread skepticism as to any engagement with those viewed as responsible for much of the misery. This lack of consensus on advocacy work inhibited the development of stronger advocacy strategies and greater engagement with those who make the decisions.

Greater training is also required not simply on advocacy but also policy analysis. Post Mitch experience demonstrated real weaknesses in CACSOS' (and INGOs') knowledge of how Central American governments actually function. In order to carry out advocacy work successfully, people need to know how the political and policy



systems work at all levels, and how they are supposed to work. For instance, how can a group engage with the government's budgetary process? They also need to know how to develop power maps in order to know who are the players, and how decisions are made both formally and informally.

Other factors inhibited greater developments in advocacy work. First had to do with the timetable under which CACSOs worked and organizational development of the national coalitions. The work carried out post-Mitch responded to the calendar established in the Consultative group meetings and the enhanced Highly Indebted Poor Countries initiative and the call for Poverty Reduction Strategy papers. CASCOS were often in the position of reacting rather than being proactive and responding to their own development agenda. Secondly, all three of the national organizations formed after Hurricane Mitch, and had to not only respond to the political conjunctures but also develop organizationally – establishing offices, defining their missions, elaborating operational structures and developing national reconstruction proposals. Considering all these factors, the amount of work that was carried out is impressive. Three years later, the national coalitions such as the CCER and Interforos are in a much stronger position to respond to new initiatives such as the Inter-American Development Bank's Plan Puebla Panama and

the Central American Free Trade Agreement being promoted by the Bush Administration.

B. Civil Society Participation

Enormous strides were made in getting both donor nations and Central American governments to publicly recognize and acknowledge that civil society has a legitimate role to play in the reconstruction process. Civil society actors engaged more with representatives of the donor community and there was unprecedented civil society participation in all of the Consultative Group meetings from Stockholm 1999 to Madrid 2001. In terms of stimulating participatory democracy in the region, this was an important advance.

Through greater participation, civil society groups from both the north and the south were able to successfully petition for ongoing governmental presentations on the reconstruction and transformation processes in each of the Consultative Group meetings following Stockholm 1999. For example, for the 2000 Nicaragua CG, the CCER was able to point out that the government had not advanced in the area of reducing environmental vulnerability or in the area of decentralization and citizen participation. Although the donor community generally applauded the Central American governments' advances, the CACSOs were able to point out failings at the meetings, which sometimes found resonance with the G5. In another example, without pressure from civil society, the Madrid CG would have focused almost exclusively on free trade and private investment opportunities. The CACSOs were also able to present their own analyses on progress in the reconstruction and transformation areas.

In addition, the Nicaraguan and Honduran governments created commissions (CONPES in the former and the Participation Commission in the latter) as the vehicles for greater civil society participation. But the mandates of the two organizations were weak, and while structures were developed, left undefined was how they would work with government ministries or how suggestions from the commissions would be incorporated into existing reconstruction policies. To some extent, participation was limited to responding to partial or inaccurate government information. The commissions

were not designed to include civil society throughout a process of elaborating, implementing or evaluating development policies and proposals. Subsequently, CACSOs felt isolated and marginalized. They argued that their participation was more to improve the democratic image of the governments than to seriously discuss and integrate suggestions from the commissions they had formed. Granted, there is little experience in Latin America of consultative processes between governments and civil society groups. Plus, governments and donors expressed concern that non-elected groups would have veto power over government decisions. At the same time, it must be recognized that the commissions were developed precisely because large sectors did not feel included in the reconstruction policies. Mechanisms could have been created that would not have usurped the role of the governments, but would have

allowed for greater authority of the commissions around reconstruction policies.

...lack of formal methods to respond to and incorporate at least some of the civil society suggestions undermined the real potential of a participatory process.

Essentially, lack of formal methods to respond to and incorporate at least some of the civil society suggestions undermined the real potential of a participatory process and left civil society organizations with the impression that they were being co-opted. Recognizing the

inability to influence development policy, the Honduran civil society organizations such as Interforos and the Foro Ciudadano felt obligated to withdraw from the National Participation Committee at different times. In El Salvador, all political space closed when President Flores proclaimed that as the democratically elected representative, no further civil society participation was or is required. In contrast, the CCER continues to participate in CONPES, as it is one of the few political spaces in Nicaragua available to civil society, not because this body is able to make effective changes. In the end, neither participation through the government created mechanisms post- Stockholm nor demanding accountability in the Consultative Group influenced the development policies that would

guarantee the implementation of the Stockholm principles or a transformative reconstruction. Donors and governments must think through and develop models of participatory structures that can genuinely respond to civil society input.

C. Broad National Coalition Building

In both Honduras and Nicaragua, the CACSOs made impressive efforts to develop broad coalitions across a previously divided civil society landscape. These coalitions undertook extensive efforts to develop wide-ranging plans for reconstruction and transformation of their respective countries after Hurricane Mitch. In El Salvador, civil society groups in the hardest hit region (the Bajo Lempa) came together to propose a disaster mitigation plan, and developed an effective advocacy strategy that resulted in the government incorporating the proposal into their national plan.

An ongoing challenge for civil society, however, is to explore avenues to broadening their membership even further to involve key sectors to Central American societies such as women, agricultural, labor and ethnic groups. This is difficult when confronted with limited time and financial resources, yet to ignore these sectors mirrors errors committed by the government and continues marginalizing large populations and sectors. Furthermore, it opens the civil society groups to criticisms from governments, donors and even other civil society organizations that they are not representative.

In the coalitions that formed after Hurricane Mitch, women were in leadership roles and issues pertaining to women were seen as cross-cutting to all themes. But concrete steps to address their special requirements were poorly defined or ignored completely in the national reconstruction proposals. Similarly, ethnic groups were not heavily involved in the national coalitions although they were carrying out reconstruction work in their communities and developing their own regional proposals. Contributions to the civil society reconstruction proposals from these two sectors were often included at the last minute. Although explained by pervasive racism, poorly educated constituencies, geographical location, and limited resources, their exclusion increased their alienation and thwarted the

potential for coordinated advocacy campaigns to change the path that reconstruction was taking.

A similar issue affecting participation in the national coalitions is the relationship between non-governmental organizations, often located in the capitals, and social movements. In most of the countries, the leadership of the national coalitions consists of NGOs, federations and sector specific coalitions. The NGOs were formed to provide financial and technical support to constituent organizations, and are seen as different from the social movements. Representatives in the social movements do not want the NGOs to speak on their behalf but do see them as a vehicle for certain types of support. The types of support and what the different roles should be are not well thought out or defined but are causing tensions that affect greater participation in the national coalitions. In addition, the base of the coalitions has argued that decision-making is too centralized and information is not shared. Conversely, the leadership of the coalitions, many of whom have other responsibilities, expressed frustration that more organizations and people from the base did not assume responsibilities.

These are very complex issues and there are several factors involved, among them lack of financial resources, lack of skilled personnel, and lack of time that limit the possibility for greater work. At the same time, there are ways to counteract these limitations such as developing organizational structures that facilitate communication and distribute workloads. Developing these structures can, in turn, facilitate the advocacy work carried out at the national level by greater information exchange and helping to guarantee broader representativity of the base in advocacy work. This is a difficult challenge, but a first step toward solving these organizational problems is to recognize them.

D. National Civil Society Proposals

Civil society proposals were important for articulating a national vision for development and for elaborating general policy objectives. Nevertheless, they were often too broad, resembling political platforms, or they mixed the very broad with the very specialized. For

example, one country's proposal called on the Ministry of Education to establish environmental education as a requirement for middle school students. Another country's proposal called for natural resource management in such a way that contributes to combating poverty and improves the quality of life. While these are important, as are all the points in the national proposals, the lack of specificity made it difficult to use these documents as advocacy tools or to offer as alternative proposals to those proffered by the governments.

Understandably, it was difficult to develop proposals around specific policy objectives because of the size of the national coalitions and the limited timeline. Yet, the lack of specificity and concreteness made it easier for the donor community to dismiss the validity of the proposals in terms of development plans designed to reduce social, economic and environmental vulnerabilities. Multilateral Development Bank representatives would say to the CACSO proposals that they agreed generally with the principles involved but wanted more details as to how they could be implemented. They required a plan and estimated budgets. Civil society representatives would often argue, however, that developing more technical proposals was not their responsibility but of the governments. While this would ideally be true, in the case of the Central American governments there is a vacuum of skilled people with the appropriate technical expertise. The vacuum was one that civil society groups could have filled had they had more concrete proposals. Furthermore, it was contradictory to demand the right to participate but not be willing to take the participation one step further.

Where proposals of civil society were concrete, they were often incorporated. For instance, the groups in the Bajo Lempa region were successfully able to get the Salvadoran government to incorporate some of their road and dyke projects incorporated into the official proposal presented by the Salvadoran government in Stockholm. The concreteness and feasibility of the proposals made the advocacy work and negotiations with the decision makers more likely to yield positive results.

Secondly, enormous effort was expended to develop civil society reconstruction and transformation proposals but, in the end, very little was done with them. Government and civil society proposals were developed in a parallel fashion after the December 1998

Consultative Group meeting. This is understandable given that traditionally, governments have centralized decision-making structures and have not consulted civil society. Nevertheless, two questions arise. First, was developing a separate proposal a good use of time? Next, how could the proposals have been better used rather than being shelved after the Stockholm CG meeting?

Perhaps, it would it have been a better use of time and resources to lobby legislative and municipal representatives around specific sector needs or work with government technicians to develop project proposals with budgets rather than develop a completely separate document. This assumes that government legislators and staff would have been open to civil society participation. Given the historical tendencies, though, this was unlikely. In the future, it might be worthwhile for CASCOS to target sector specific proposals and particular government agencies, if only to begin a process of exchange and relationship building.

The existing proposals did provide an alternative vision of development and as such were useful for presenting to donors at the Stockholm Consultative Group meeting. Because the proposals provide a general framework on social, economic and environmental issues, they should not be abandoned. Even now they can still be used as the framework from which the member organizations within the CCER, Interforos and the Foro de la Sociedad Civil can develop more concrete proposals for use in advocacy work with the municipal representatives and government staff.

E. Civil Society Relationship with International Non-Governmental Organizations

Following Hurricane Mitch, the INGOs played a critical support role to the CACSOs. They helped pressure their governments and the MDB's to guarantee participation of civil society organizations in the Consultative Group meetings. They also contributed to building counterparts' knowledge of how bilateral and multilateral donor institutions work through trainings, providing information and hands-on experience such as accompanying delegations to donor meetings. The INGOs monitored the

reconstruction process and the implementation of the Stockholm Agreements by Central American governments, and the bilateral and multilateral donors, and publicized their findings. They assisted CACSOs in building relationships with USAID, the IDB and members of the G5, and organized meetings for Central American delegations with government officials, the professional development community and donors. Finally, they exchanged information between countries in the North and South to coordinate advocacy messages and activities, which enhanced their work with donors on reconstruction issues. The level of coordination increased the effectiveness of advocacy work overall.

The coordination between the INGOs and the CACSOs, however, was not without challenges. One difficulty was the natural tension between the work in the donor capitals and work in the Central American region. They are two different dynamics with different demands. People in the northern capitals would need names of delegates to gain security clearances; concrete documents for advocacy work (preferably translated) or immediate answers to questions for lobbying purposes. In the region, it took more time to decide who would represent the civil society organizations on delegations due to overloaded schedules and issues of representativity. Documents took time to develop, especially if they had to be consulted with member organizations. It is not clear whether this tension can be resolved; it at least must be understood.



Similarly, some civil society representatives expressed concern that the INGO and foundation attention on CASCO advocacy work accelerated a process that they themselves had not initiated and committed them to strategies for which they were not prepared. Prior to Hurricane Mitch, there was little history of “construction” of civil society and certainly very little “advocacy” work. After the disaster hit, international NGOs and foundations descended upon on the region, promoting a new strategy called “incidencia” and providing funding to support national coalitions’ work in this area and organizational development. It is perceived by some Central Americans that this forced coalitions to form rapidly and in a non-organic fashion, and that these national coalitions implemented strategies with little real capacity. In a similar vein, an international development representative in Honduras commented that local organizations were under intense pressure to respond with development ideas after Hurricane Mitch when little local knowledge or capacity existed to respond to the new opportunities. Where local capacity was extremely weak, some INGOs filled the void, often to the detriment of building local capacity. Currently, some of these same INGOs are competing with local NGOs for resources from state institutions such as the Honduran Social Investment Fund.¹⁶

Secondly, INGOs concerned with development need to integrate advocacy work into their ongoing development projects rather than carry out advocacy work in isolation from work on the ground. This is important in order to promote more sustainable development. It would also provide greater opportunities for capacity building of community based organizations and social movements, and incorporating their perspectives into the development and advocacy strategies.

Thirdly, INGOs must develop stronger and more coordinated advocacy strategies directed towards their embassies and governments’ policies towards Central America, rather than simply focusing on CASCOs advocacy work with the international donor governments and institutions. This also needs to be continuous and coherent with CASCO advocacy strategies. While this occurred prior to

¹⁶ In Spanish, this is the Fondo Hondureño para la Inversión Social (FHIS).

the Consultative Group meeting in Stockholm, momentum slowed after the donor meeting and efforts became dispersed with the introduction of new initiatives such as the IMF poverty reduction debt relief strategies.

Finally, the INGOs perceived their role to be improving civil society advocacy skills with the bilateral and multilateral donors, helping them to access information, and accompanying them in the meetings. Developing strategies targeting the Central American governments was not seen in the realm of their work. The INGOs should consider whether they could have facilitated the deepening of democratic processes and increased CACSOs capacity to engage with their own governments.

F. Relationships between Civil Society and Bilateral and Multilateral Donors

Relationships between the CACSOs and the country offices of USAID, the IDB and members of the donor Follow-up Group were significantly strengthened. The capacity of CACSOs to get information on donor policies and interests, and to present their views was increased. Equally, their ability to access international donors and multi-lateral development banks in Washington and other capitals improved considerably. As a result, contacts were established, relationships built, and the legitimacy of the CACSOs with the bilateral donors and the multilateral development banks improved. At times, members of the follow-up group were allies on certain points. For example, the donors supported civil society groups' demand for progress reports on reconstruction by governments in the Consultative Group meetings.

Because advocacy work is a process, developing relationships with the donors is an important step. At the end of the day, however, governments are the clients of the bilateral donors and the MDBs. Although open to meeting with civil society organizations on issues such as participation in the CG meetings, they were averse to discussing policies such as privatization of public utilities, conditions or their own investment priorities. Too, donors were willing to discuss the implementation of the Stockholm Principles but not

to have ongoing dialogue with CACSOs on the development and implementation of non-emergency loans and projects. Ongoing dialogue can improve the quality of the loans, help guarantee completion of the project and promote greater civil society ownership of projects. Donors demanded transparency and inclusiveness of the governments but many were not themselves transparent. For example, too often public information was limited to the Internet and only published in English, which the majority of people could not access.

On a separate point, it appeared that donors were more of an advocacy target than the Central American governments. The CASCOS perceived the bilateral donors and the multilateral development banks as mandating what the Central American governments did in terms of reconstruction and budget priorities. Therefore it was superfluous to target the government. This is too simple an approach. Relationships with the donor are important, but it is also crucial to meet with government officials and technicians. Government officials do make decisions and technical staff can provide a technical perspective. Furthermore, meetings provide an opportunity to inform them of alternative ways of seeing an issue and possible solutions. At the very least, documenting unsuccessful attempts to meetings with government or elected officials is important and can be used when meeting with the bilateral and MDB representatives to demonstrate their political unwillingness to involve civil society.

G. Bilateral and Multilateral Donors

Donors and Central American governments publicly acknowledged that addressing human and ecological vulnerability should be the principal goals of reconstruction. They also publicly committed to a reconstruction process that would go beyond an immediate response and integrate long-term poverty reduction into the development plans. This marked a departure from traditional approaches that address immediate needs without looking at underlying causes or preventative measures. Finally, donors recognized the need to strengthen democratic institutions and the implementation of good governance practices such as eradicating corruption.

Recall that IDB President Iglesias stated, “[r]econstruction must not be at the expense of transformation.” Donors assumed, however, that transformation would come by promoting economic growth, and through reforming the judicial, executive and legislative branches. The reforms are necessary in order to strengthen democracies and to guarantee that aid and financial resources are used wisely. Transformation through economic growth, however, is not a departure from previous economic development strategies. This model was never discussed and the concept of transformation was not defined. The Consultative Group meetings were not the appropriate forums for holding this discussion or for hashing out the details because time was limited, agendas were established months in advance, and all the actors involved prepared their presentations accordingly.

Unfortunately, opportunities for such debates were never created. Donors and the multilateral development banks continued to emphasize the same policies of expanding free trade through more investment in maquiladoras, greater agricultural exports, and

Even as early as December 15, 1998, US agencies and multilateral development banks discussed what they saw as the reconstruction priorities and their policy interests.

through intensifying structural adjustment policies such as privatizations as the framework within which poverty would be reduced. Even as early as December 15, 1998, US agencies and multilateral development banks discussed what they saw as the reconstruction priorities and their policy interests. Department of State and Department of Commerce officials stated that the successes of long-term

reconstruction depended on economic growth and that “trade” would be the “engine” of long-term recovery. A World Bank official called for speeding up and deepening privatization efforts. These reconstruction priorities and policy proposals were a continuation of previous strategies, which have not only failed to end Central America’s spiral of poverty but also contributed to the environmental, economic, and social vulnerabilities that resulted in Hurricane Mitch having a greater impact in the first place.

A clear example of this can be seen when one considers the amount of aid pledged to mitigate disasters. According to an official at Centro Humboldt, an environmental NGO in Nicaragua, only ten percent of aid pledged in Stockholm was to address environmental issues despite studies that demonstrate the effectiveness of such investments.¹⁷ In contrast, a greater percentage of reconstruction aid was devoted to infrastructure and economic revitalization. For example in Honduras, the government, USAID, the IDB, Japan and the World Bank committed significant portions of their reconstruction aid to infrastructure (rebuilding roads and bridges) and recapitalizing private industry. Donors need to go further and target aid directly to programs that will reduce the social, economic and environmental vulnerabilities, and reforms that increase transparency and good governance. The fact that there was not greater progress in these areas is indicative of the ambiguousness of the Stockholm Principles and the lack of shared understanding of what a transformative reconstruction entails.¹⁸

H. Follow-Up Committees (G5)

The Stockholm Accords established a regional Follow-up Committee and one for each country (G5). Each committee was different, influenced by the politics of each country as well as by the personali-

¹⁷ For instance, Robert Kaplan, the Region II Director for the Environmental and Natural Resources Management Division of the Inter-American Development Bank (IADB), claims that the approximately 80 natural disasters that have occurred in Central America since 1970 have cost an average loss of \$1.5 billion per year. (Quoted in VM paper to LASA conference, 2000). Natural disasters represent an enormous cost for the countries affected and the international community. The IDB estimates that the annual average cost of disasters from 1970 to 1999 ranges between \$700 million to \$3.3 billion. In the case of the IDB, assistance to natural disasters increased substantially to \$1.5 billion over the last four years, 10 times more than in the past 15 years on an annual basis. Even more alarmingly, studies show that costs for disasters accumulate, making it more difficult for countries to recover with each disaster. (McElhinney, 2000; Mora, 1999; Cochrane, 1996). This investment saves lives too. For example, Oxfam America country studies conducted in each country after Hurricane Mitch, demonstrated the importance of community and disaster preparedness trainings in preventing loss of life.

¹⁸ There were exceptions to this. For instance, the Swedish government played a critical role in the Stockholm Consultative Group meeting and in the follow-up mechanisms in each country. It guaranteed that the themes of greater transparency, accountability, decentralization, and a focus on human and environmental vulnerability was integrated into the Stockholm meeting. After Stockholm, the Swedish government initiated the meetings between the G5 and the Honduran Comisión de Participación de la Sociedad Civil on a monthly basis to exchange information and share concerns.

ties of the various secretary pro temps. However, the committees were influential in pressuring government to engage regularly with civil society organizations; coordinating development efforts on specific issues and sectors; criticizing lack of government development work on specific areas; and helping to ensure civil society participation in the Consultative group meetings.

But the G5 did not work equally in each country so any potential impact was reduced. The two extremes were El Salvador and Honduras. In El Salvador, the Stockholm follow-up group was not at all effective and the members were unwilling to support the United Nation Development Program's initiative in El Salvador or push for government dialogue with the civil society organizations. In contrast, the Honduran G5 played an important role both in having bilateral meetings with the Participation Commission, and attempting to encourage a dialogue between the Commission and the government. This G5 was also innovative in the 13 work groups formed to address development issues by sector, and to solve problems and coordinate donor actions. A huge weakness, however, was that national civil society and community-based organizations were not invited to these working groups. Still, it was an attempt to improve coordination and jointly solve severe problems. The Nicaraguan G5 was somewhat in between with infrequent meetings and little contact with the CACSOs.

Despite irregularities in the operation of the G5 in each country, one positive aspect was the development of indicators in Nicaragua and Honduras designed to evaluate progress in the implementation of the Stockholm Accords. This is significant in that the donor community wrestled with how to judge whether the reconstruction projects under the framework of the Stockholm Accords were successful. However, two problems with the indicators stand out. The first is that, at least in Honduras, the indicators were not developed with the participation either of the Participation Commission or even individual groups such as Interforos. Secondly, the final product containing the indicators developed was huge; in Nicaragua there were over 800 indicators! As a measuring it was unwieldy, plus it did not involve community-based groups or NGOs in carrying out the measurement. Consequently, the indicators never really were functional as a measuring tool for successes or failures in the reconstruction process.

I. Regional Civil Society Work

Like the national counterparts, CAS faced serious limitations because of lack of resources, geographical distances, and heavy demands on an all ready over-extended leadership. An additional challenge was working in an environment where governments do not favor integration and where there were several intra-regional conflicts are taking place. For example, Nicaragua and Honduras were fighting over maritime space, and Guatemala and Belize were fighting over the demarcation of national territories. These problems notwithstanding, important advances were made on articulating a common regional vision for social and economic development through the work of CAS. The regional coalition became the civil society reference point for SICA and the IDB, and played a significant role in the Consultative Group meeting

Important advances were made on articulating a common regional vision for social and economic development.

in Madrid in March 2001 where CAS members were able to distribute the proposal and present a civil society response to integration in the plenary session.

The biggest criticisms of CAS and the proposal developed for the Madrid CG meeting were that they were not clearly articulated

with national work and the national reconstruction proposals. Clearly, this is a complex problem. In the process of developing sections of the regional proposal, different countries took the lead with support from colleagues in other countries. Often the support was inconsistent and not necessarily offered by the people who had played lead roles in developing the national proposals. So there was disengagement between the national and regional proposals. Although CAS held a meeting in San Salvador in December 2000 to approve the proposal prior to the Madrid CG meeting, consistent participation of the same players in all the meetings was difficult and there was not sufficient time to evaluate in depth all that had been written.

CAS, or other regional civil society groupings, could take three steps to increase coordination and the efficiency of its work. The first is to identify and prioritize which regional issue to work on first. The second is to encourage sector specific regional proposals that develop their own priorities and advocacy strategies in coordination with each other. As previously mentioned, this was successfully done with the group within CAS that worked on the environment and mitigation of regional disasters. CAS could facilitate its work by guaranteeing that information on the regional activities are disseminated to the member organizations to keep people informed, to encourage feedback and to prevent misunderstandings of work at the regional level. Finally, CAS could strengthen its work by building stronger alliances with other regional organizations such as the Consultative Committee of SICA (CC-SICA), identifying common priorities and implementing joint advocacy strategies towards governments and the donor community.





V. Lessons of the past for the future

To many people in Central America, it may seem that the advocacy work carried out after Hurricane Mitch was a waste of time and a misuse of precious resources because the promise of a transformative reconstruction did not take place. Yet, as we have seen, there were important gains and there are lessons to draw on in order to make future work even better. In her study “NGO and Grassroots Policy Influence: What is Success,” Dr. Valerie Miller describes different levels of policy successes. She bases her work on five case studies of Filipino civil society coalitions and groups that focused on influencing policy through legislative and/or administrative change. The case studies were carried out by the coalitions themselves.

Dr. Miller argues that success in changing policy needs to be viewed by measuring gains multi-dimensionally. She defines three areas as: 1. Policy 2. Civil society and 3. Democracy. Success at the policy level happens when there are changes in policies or legislation. At the level of civil society, it is when CACSOs are strengthened to keep governments accountable and responsive to civil society needs. Democracy she defines as when the democratic space for civil society is expanded and their legitimacy is increased. Too frequently, she argues, success is narrowly defined in terms of victories in policy or legislative changes.

Applying Dr. Miller’s definitions to the post Hurricane Mitch advocacy work, the CACSOs made important gains in the areas of civil society and democracy. Civil society did not alter legislation or the development policies and the landmark Stockholm Accords have yet to be implemented. Important successes, however, were achieved in the area of participation, expanding democratic space, strengthening CACSO advocacy skills, and improving their political legitimacy abroad and even nationally.

Achieving success in legislative and policy areas is more challenging, especially when one considers the political histories and current

contexts of each country, and the role of the Central American governments. Nevertheless, the post-Hurricane work offers important lessons that can be used to promote progress in legislative areas. These lessons apply to the Central American Civil Society organizations, the international non-governmental agencies and the donor community.

Extraordinary opportunities to influence development policies such as the post Hurricane Mitch and the Poverty Reduction Strategy required for Highly Indebted Poor Country will continue to arise periodically. It is important that CACSOs be prepared to engage with the governments and the donors when these opportunities do open. However, to fully take advantage of these opportunities, the experience from the Mitch reconstruction process suggests several areas of work that the CACSOs should consider.

To begin with, national coalitions should consider fostering discussion and debate about advocacy work, and what is needed to effectively implement advocacy campaigns. Participants could explore organizational models that would best facilitate advocacy work such as developing advocacy teams to work on behalf of the national coalition or creating advocacy teams per sector. And, until there is a shared understanding within civil society about advocacy work and how to do it, this new form of struggle will not be as effective as it could be.

Participants could also identify needs such as education and capacity training on the various advocacy methodologies, or civic education on how governments should operate. Part of any advocacy training for whichever model should include the topics of policy analysis, coalition building, and negotiation skills. Policy analysis is not widely used but it is critical to understand what a current policy is in order to formulate alternatives, to identify the different players and potential allies. Secondly, coalition building is a serious challenge in post conflict regions such as Central America where past differences inhibit present collaboration. But without unified coalitions it is even more difficult to influence policy changes and easier for governments to promote divisions. Similarly, Central Americans need to learn how to negotiate their positions better. Too frequently, civil society groups enter meetings with an all or nothing position. Greater understanding is required of the fact that when there are opposing positions, they will win some points and lose others.

CASCOs also need to develop systems that will facilitate information gathering and exchange between the local, regional and national levels. Information exchange can prevent isolation and alienation of the member organizations, and can increase awareness, transparency and feedback. Member organizations need to know what have been the results of advocacy work and where there have been setbacks. Information should include who advocacy representatives met with, what was promoted, what was agreed upon, and the next steps.

In order to facilitate the information exchange, CACSOs should consider the development of short and long-term indicators in order to gauge progress and effectiveness of advocacy work on reconstruction. These should be developed during an organization-wide planning process so there is acceptance of the strategy and so that the organization will have the methodology to conduct an evaluation of the work at a later date. At the same time, INGOs must also facilitate information exchange to CACSOs regarding advocacy activities in their countries. The advocacy work carried out post-Hurricane Mitch was significant in that it was a coordinated effort between North South organizations. At the same time, few in the region knew about the work in the U.S. or Europe. Providing this information will strengthen coordination as well as help broaden understanding of advocacy work at the international level to member organizations in the region.

Both the INGOs and CACSOs need to move from carrying out advocacy strategies at key political moments in the region to developing ongoing and continuous advocacy strategies to influence policies that affect their lives. As one person noted, it is important to advance not only from the protest to the proposal but to a systematic and strategic advocacy campaign that is continuous and ongoing. An ongoing advocacy campaign should be coherent with national and regional proposals rather than simply respond to a calendar imposed from outside. Ongoing advocacy strategies allow for continuity, time to gain experience, and know well who the actors are. Secondly, it will encourage prioritizing policy demands, and using and improving materials developed for previous key political moments. As stated earlier, while the national proposals developed for the CG meetings were important in articulating an alternative development vision desired by a large portion of civil society, the lack of prioritization and

specificity of the proposals made it difficult to use them effectively as advocacy tools directed towards advocacy targets or as practical alternatives to the official projects to be presented to government officials or donors. Both CACSOs and INGOs should work together to determine how to sustain ongoing advocacy campaigns.

In developing long-term advocacy strategies, CACSOs should consider including as targets representatives of municipal governments and technical staff as well as officials of the executive branch, bilateral donors and the multilateral development banks. The strategies should be based on an analysis as to who makes the decisions and who can apply pressure where. Finally, CACSOs should strengthen their alliance work identifying with whom they can build coalitions and develop joint strategies around a common issue.

The civil society commissions that formed after Stockholm were a positive step forwards in improving civil society participation in development matters, yet governments and the donor community need to establish more meaningful consultative mechanisms that have legal legitimacy. Donors and governments can both employ methodologies for consultation that invite discussion and debate rather than a one sided presentation. Donors should encourage governments to direct ministers and technical staff to meet regularly with the commissions to debate issues, and to provide the commissions with the information they need to make informed judgments. In these meetings, the government staff can receive proposals and recommendations from the commission and negotiate controversial points.

CACSOs should consider debating organizational development models and division of labor with their membership. CACSOs should develop organizational outreach plans designed to be more inclusive of sectors such as ethnic and agricultural groups. Greater representativity will increase the legitimacy of the organizations and facilitate the development of more concrete project proposals based on the needs of the communities. Decentralizing the decision making process in the organizations would also help facilitate the involvement at the regional and local level, offering the potential for greater participation.

Expanding in these two areas is difficult given the political contexts and severe polarizations affecting each country as well as the dwin-

ding economic resources, although it is not impossible. For example, in mid-2001, Interforos began a process of decentralization in Honduras.¹⁹ The leadership is no longer centralized in a coordinating body largely situated in Tegucigalpa. The executive committee consists of representatives from different regional forums, members of Interforos, elected by the organizations from the specific regions. Despite the fact that all but one of the elected leaders are men, the decentralization process has increased Interforos' legitimacy with its members, and is providing the opportunity to develop more concrete policy initiatives that respond to local and regional realities.

At the same time, caution must be taken to avoid complete decentralization that inhibits the ability to respond to key political moments or carrying out ongoing advocacy work at a national and international level. This is a challenge that Interforos now faces with the regional offices being distant from the Capitol. To prevent this, CACSOs should again, consider developing a centrally located advocacy team that can carry out advocacy work at the national level and with the international donor community at the same time they are decentralizing. Or, consider a more flexible form of organizational structure that allows them to respond to key political moments.

The CACSOs must maintain and build their relationships with the bilateral and multilateral donors. The donor community can be important allies in supporting legislative and policy changes around shared concerns such as issues of transparency, good governance, and institutional reforms. Key to this is analyzing where donor interests and CACSO interests coincide or are similar, and develop advocacy campaigns designed to garner support for civil society positions. The INGOs can continue to help CACSOs by informing them of donor initiatives in the region, helping them to access donors in the capitals and carrying out direct advocacy initiatives around specific, prioritized CACSO proposals.

Next, CACSOs (both national and regional) should work on developing more concrete policy objectives with which to petition both governments and the donor community. With concrete objectives, and better integration of policy advisors and service providers, incre-

¹⁹ The process of decentralization coincided with the elaboration of regional poverty reduction proposals and in the process, the regional leaders were strengthened.

mental reforms in specific areas are possible. The platforms developed for the Consultative Group meetings are general policy goals and represent the interests of the member organizations. The CACSOs must go one step further and develop concrete, viable proposals with budgets to make it easier for decision makers to offer their support. Without concrete proposals, governments and the donor community have an easy excuse to withhold political and financial support.

The INGOs can facilitate proposal development by facilitating access to international experts on development issues such as rural development. International NGOs have many things to consider when promoting the strategy of advocacy and the ongoing work in the region. The first is to strengthening coordination mechanisms with their international colleagues as well as with the CACSOs. For example, the International Cooperation Association (Asociación de la Cooperación Internacional -ACI) in Honduras. ACI is a loosely formed body of development groups that meets regularly to discuss sector themes such as housing, agricultural development or education. After Hurricane Mitch it came together to address the reconstruction needs and support the work of Interforos prior to the Stockholm. The work of ACI, however, was stronger around reconstruction issues than the advocacy work. In building stronger coalitions, INGOs should explore how to incorporate advocacy training into their daily development work. Secondly, INGOs need to take particular care to avoid displacing local groups, focusing instead on building local capacity. Next, INGOs should explore how to adapt northern strategies to Central American realities. Advocacy work is even more challenging where democratic institutions are weak and ineffective, and where the majority of people have accumulative grief as a result of civil conflict, living in poverty, and a series of natural disasters. While ineffective democratic institutions underscore the need for advocacy work, it needs to be carried out in consideration of and responding to the other needs. For example, civic education on how institutions such as national assemblies are supposed to work. Finally, CACSOs and INGOs should have an extensive meeting to identify needs such as advocacy trainings and capacity building, and to elaborate a plan to meet them. INGOs should commit to providing ongoing support. During the meeting, participants should also discuss how to incorporate advocacy into the day-to-day development work, and how to make the advocacy work more visibly effective.

Donors, on the other hand, must seriously consider how to use their aid to promote transformative reconstruction in Central America. It is alarming that reconstruction aid continued to flow, for example, to the Alemán Government after it jailed the Comptroller General and gutted the comptroller's office. In 1999 it became well known that Alemán's personal wealth increased over 800% from the time he was mayor of Managua to his present position. (Envio Magazine, April 1999; NACLA Report, September/October 1999). Time will tell how much of reconstruction aid went to his personal enrichment. This and other such corruption could have been avoided had aid been more tightly conditioned to specific programs areas designed to reduce the social, economic, and environmental vulnerabilities. Facilitating this would be encouraging a public debate around how these vulnerabilities are defined, what are the root causes of these vulnerabilities, and developing common strategies to overcome them.

Further, international donors should guarantee greater investment in risk reduction strategies and disaster preparedness trainings at the local level in order to help mitigate the impact of future disasters. Experience and studies have proven that investments designed to prevent and mitigate natural disasters are economically efficient decisions. Instead, they have chosen to continue shoring up inefficient government ministries or support projects that meet their economic policy interests. Take, for example, donors' longstanding financial support to COPECO (Permanent Emergency Contingency Commission) in Honduras in order to respond to emergencies. This has not translated into greater community preparation to respond to disasters or reduce the impact of disasters. In contrast, the Bajo Lempa experience and other studies²⁰ clearly demonstrate that organized communities can considerably mitigate the impact of disasters, contributing to the preservation of life and the distribution of emergency relief aid. In light of government ineptitude and mismanagement, the resources, technology and disaster preparedness trainings must be decentralized to municipalities and local community organizations. This would be a more efficient use of aid with higher results

²⁰ For example, Oxfam America country studies conducted in each country after Hurricane Mitch, demonstrated the importance of community and disaster preparedness trainings in saving lives.

Investment in disaster mitigation can also reduce the consequences of natural and man-made disasters, and reduce future costs. The World Bank and the United States Geographical Survey have calculated that economic losses worldwide from natural disasters in the 1990s would have been reduced by as much as \$280 billion by investing around \$40 billion in risk reduction strategies.

Finally, if donors truly want to see meaningful participation by civil society organizations, then they must work with the CACSO to guarantee that the mechanisms created for participation have authority, legitimacy and power to articulate with government bodies. Failure to do so makes participation meaningless and a waste of limited resources. The CACSOs and INGOs should continue to work together to pressure the international financial institutions around these points and on helping to target aid to where it can be more effective.

Conclusion

Post Hurricane Mitch Consultative Group meetings and the Stockholm Accords, held the promise that reconstruction with transformation would take place in Central America. Central Americans had high expectations that they would see a reduction in poverty, environmental degradation, greater transparency, decentralization and respect for all human rights. Further, they had hopes that these would be gained with the active participation of civil society.

Sadly, little has changed since Stockholm, and Central America is once again facing the ravages of the most recent disasters; the droughts and the fall in coffee crisis. Implementation of the Stockholm Accords is still desperately needed.

As a result of the enormous amount of work done by CACSOs over the last three years, the skills have been developed and space opened to continue carrying out the advocacy work that could lead to concrete policy changes. The challenge facing the CACSOs is to fight to keep the space open as well as to build on the work of the last three years. As they did after Hurricane Mitch, CACSOs and INGOs should plan a meeting as discussed above to elaborate the next phase of this work and how to use the lessons learned from the past for the future.

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WOLA Reports, Proposals and Correspondence, April 1999 to March 2001.

UNDP Human Development Report 1999 and 2000

Annexes

General Chronology of Post Hurricane Mitch Work

October 1998	Hurricane Mitch hits Central America
December 1998	Emergency Consultative Group Meeting in Washington DC
February 1999	Meeting in Guatemala to discuss International NGO Conference in May before the Consultative Group meeting in Stockholm.
May 1999	Consultative Group Meeting in Stockholm, Sweden
July 1999	Oxfam International Central America Advocacy team meets with counterparts to discuss priorities and strategies
August 1999	Honduran Government forms the Civil Society Participation Commission CCER begins participating in CONPES UNDP facilitated Mecansimos de Seguimiento formed in El Salvador
September 1999	Annual Meetings of the World Bank and the IMF
October 1999	Interforos hosts meeting with International NGOs on coordination and strategy
February 2000	Consultative Group Meeting
March-December 2000	Honduran government and Interforos prepare PRSPs
May-October 2000(?)	United States coordinates Grupo de Seguimiento

May 2000-March 2001	Beginning implementation of IDB loan for Atlantic Coast of Nicaragua Centro America Solidaria preparation for Madrid Consultative Group Meeting Campaign targeting GS for civil society participation in Madrid CG meeting
August 2000	Non-governmental Organizational meeting in WDC in preparation for Regional Consultative Group meeting in Madrid.
September 2001	Donor follows up group meetings in Sweden with CACSO & INGO representatives.
January 2001	Earthquakes in El Salvador Scheduled Madrid Consultative Group Meeting postponed CONGDE conference
March 2001	Consultative Group Meeting for El Salvador and for region

Anexo I.

Member Networks of Espacio Interforos Honduras

- ▶ Asociación de Organismos No Gubernamentales (ASONOG)
- ▶ Coordinadora de Instituciones Pro Niños y Niñas de Honduras (COIPRODEN)
- ▶ Comisión Permanente de Reconstrucción (CPR)
- ▶ Federación de Organizaciones Privadas de Desarrollo de Honduras (FOPRIDEH)
- ▶ Foro Social de Deuda Externa y Desarrollo de Honduras (FOSDEH)
- ▶ Foro Nacional para las Migraciones en Honduras — Sector Civil (FONAMIH)
- ▶ Foro Cáritas
- ▶ Foro Ciudadano
- ▶ Red de Comercialización Comunitaria (COMAL)
- ▶ Red de Mujeres
- ▶ Red de Jóvenes

Annex II.

Member Organizations of the CCER Nicaragua

- ▶ Asociación de Mujeres “Luisa Amanda Espinoza” — AMNLAE.
- ▶ Comité Costeño de Apoyo a la Gestión de Emergencia y Rehabilitación en Costa Caribe de Nicaragua
- ▶ Consejo de la Juventud de Nicaragua — CJN
- ▶ Coordinadora Nicaraguense de ONGs
- ▶ Coordinador Nicaraguense de ONGs que trabajan con la Niñez y la Adolescencia — CODEEN
- ▶ Federación de Coordinadora de Organismos por la rehabilitación e integración — FECONORI
- ▶ Federación de Organizaciones No Gubernamentales de Nicaragua — FONG
- ▶ Foro de Educación y Desarrollo Humano — FEDH
- ▶ Grupo de Coordinación para la prevención del Consumo de Drogas
- ▶ Grupo Propositivo de Cabildeo e Incidencia — GPC
- ▶ MIPYMEs
- ▶ Movimiento Comunal Nicaraguense — MCN
- ▶ Movimiento Pedagógico Nicaraguense
- ▶ Rede de Mujeres Contra la Violencia
- ▶ Red de Mujeres por la Salud “Maria Cavalleri”
- ▶ Red Nicaraguense de Comercio Comunitario
- ▶ Red Nicaraguense por la Democracia y el Desarrollo Local
- ▶ Red de Vivienda
- ▶ Unión Nacional de Agricultores y Ganaderos — UNAG

Annex III.

Civil Society Forum for the Reconstruction and Development of El Salvador

Member organizations:

FORO AGROPECUARIO	CONFRAS
CIPHES	ADEL CHALATENANGO
CORDES	CONAPES
UNES	CDC
FUNPROCOOP	CRD
AMATE	COORDINADORA SINDICAL
AMAR	ICI
CCC	ADC
CCM	CONCERTACIÓN
CCS	CENTROAMERICANA
AMS	CNI
ORMUSA	ACT EL SALVADOR
SOCORRO LUTERANO	MESA DE MUJERES RURALES
FRATERPAZ	COMUNIDADES DEL BAJO
CCNIS	LEMPA
CREDHO	RED ALFORJA EL SALVADOR
RED INFANCIA Y ADOLESCENCIA	CTD
FUNDESA	CODEFAM
FUNDESCA	AMPES
CONSORCIO DE ONG's DE	FORO DE MUJERES
EDUCACIÓN CIVICA	FESACORA
CEPRODE	FESPAD
FESTES	UNTS
CONAMUS	FUNSALPRODESE
CIDEP	FEDECOOPADES
CONTROL CIUDADANO	CIUDADANIA Y DESARROLLO
COACES	RED NACIONAL ADEL –
ASPS	RED CENTRAMERICANA
CONCERTACION DE MUJERES	ONG's DE DESARROLLO
PRUDENCIA AYALA	SOSTENIBLE FUNDACIÓN
IMU	MONTECRISTO

Annex IV.

The Non-Governmental Organization Declaration and Recommendation Stockholm, May 23-24, 1999

Declaration:

The organizations, coordinations and networks of Central America, Europe and the United States, gathered in Stockholm the 23rd and 24th of May 1999 in the International NGO Gathering on Central America declare:

This meeting represents an important step forward in the ongoing experience of coordination and cooperation between the organizations of the North and of Central America; it is an opportunity to strengthen and develop our efforts.

We express our common concerns about the devastating effects of Hurricane Mitch on the populations of Central America. The hurricane revealed the severe vulnerabilities of the region and the need to undertake profound economic, social, environmental and political transformations.

We recognize and support the efforts made by the civil society of Central America to develop proposals and to establish priorities for the reconstruction and transformation of the Region. Given that some of the governments have not demonstrated much interest in recognizing representative bodies of the civil society, we urge them to be inclusive and to coordinate their development and cooperation policies with the civil society in order to face the challenges of the reconstruction and transformation of the region.

We consider it important to strengthen our efforts to influence Governments of the North and of Central America to include the priorities of civil society and to guarantee a real and effective participation of women, indigenous and black people, youth and

disabled people among others; ensuring equitable treatment in development and cooperation policies.

We recognize that the participation of civil society in the Consultative Group Meeting on Central America that will take place in Stockholm on the 25 and 28 of May 1999 is a n unprecedented event, and should be maintained and strengthened in the future. Serious efforts should be made to reach agreement between the governments, international cooperation and civil society in the formulation, implementation, follow-up and evaluation of the regional and national plans, policies, programs and projects.

In addition, we share an interest in establishing conditionalities that will guarantee an effective process of transformation of Central America, together with concrete follow up mechanisms with the participation of the civil society. (Our proposals follow).

We thank the Swedish organizations that have made this event possible.

Stockholm, Sweden 24th of May 1999

Recommendations of the International Gathering of Non-Governmental Organizations on Central America

The following recommendations summarize the work of the civil society organizations of the different Central American countries and the region as a whole on reconstruction and transformation proposals.

In addition to the proposals and plans of reconstruction presented, efforts have been made to establish follow up mechanisms to guarantee civil society participation in the planning, implementation, follow up and evaluation of the development projects and programs.

For the organizations that have participated in the International NGO Gathering on Central America in Stockholm, actions taken towards the reduction of the multiple vulnerabilities that afflict Central America will be more effective if:

- ▶ The planning and implementation mobilizes a variety of actions, both from the government sectors and from the civil society in all its diversity (ethnic, gender, generational and physical ability) towards a new mode of working together with the international cooperation.
- ▶ There are formally defined institutions for the follow up and evaluation of results and the reports of the activities mentioned above, and these institutions are structured properly in cultural and technical terms, as well as in terms of human resources.
- ▶ There is deepening of the empowerment of local actors in the economic and social network, with an effective decentralization for a balanced development.
- ▶ The reduction of the overwhelming burden of the foreign debt leads to real opportunities for funding development through adequate exchange mechanisms, which links debt relief forums with cooperation organizations.

There is a political commitment of the participating organizations to guarantee an equitable participation of women in all levels of decision, planning, implementation and evaluation of the projects, programs and initiatives that result from the Consultative Group meeting.

Recommendations on vulnerability:

Because of the diverse and complex elements that contribute to the vulnerability of the societies of the Central American region, it is recommended to give priority to the following areas:

- ① To attack the root of the vicious circle between the limits on accumulation of small producers and peasants, and rural poverty, urban marginalization, and fragility of the environment.
- ② To invest in the transformation of the health and education systems, and develop relevant and effective social policies that contribute to reduce the inequalities between people, instead of increasing them.
- ③ To implement adequate macro economic policies that will not sacrifice development to stability, although without provoking unmanageable imbalances, which would imply costly adjustments in the future.
- ④ To promote equal opportunities for all people, recognizing physical, gender, ethnic and generational diversity.
- ⑤ To respect labor and international ILO norms.

The reduction of vulnerabilities implies, both from cooperation programs and public investment policies, an effective mobilization of human capacities and of existing organizations as well as activities to strengthen those organizations and to create new capacities at the local, national and regional levels.

Cooperation based on these principles should implement effective conditionalities, supported by international agreements that value and facilitate internal political conditions geared toward participation.

The instruments and mechanisms of participation should be implemented at different levels of the development process not only to

participate in the central levels of decision making, but also a shared implementation capacity that facilitates mutual control. It is also necessary to strengthen the technical and evaluation abilities of civil society and of involved populations.

Recommendations on transparency:

Transparency refers to all those actions intended to provide accountability for actions taken by public administration and private institutions whose acts affect the public interests.

In order to establish transparency mechanisms there must be:

- ① Reconstruction plans agreed upon by governments and civil society; information systems that are permanent and open to the public; clarity on who makes decisions and how decisions are made; definition of goals, objectives, results expected and impact, as well as civic education to establish a culture of transparency.
- ② The establishment of point mechanisms for monitoring by national audit institutions, representatives from the donor community and institutional representatives (not individuals) from the civil society at local, regional and national levels.
- ③ The establishment of joint monitoring offices at both the local and national levels, for the reception and handling of citizen complaints about the misuse of public resources (both mechanisms can be implemented by the same institution: the former based on period inspections, the latter based on complaints received).
- ④ The development and the reform of laws in order to legalize and institutionalize mechanisms for transparency and social accountability:
 - a. The law for citizen participation
 - b. The law for public information
 - c. A code of ethics for public officials
- ⑤ The establishment of external financial audits and support for regular social audits, in order to determine the popular perceptions on the efficiency and impact of plans and programs.
- ⑥ For each program or project, the development of indicators of outcome and impact with their respective methods of verification.

Recommendations on decentralization, local development and civil participation:

The NGOs gathered at the forum stress as fundamental to promote democratization and the sustainable development of Central America, of real decentralization of the State and the strengthening of municipalities, rather than decentralization understood as a process of deconcentration and privatization of government services, as is the case today.

To this end, within the framework of a national development plan, a global vision should be defined within a year, together with a strategy of decentralization agreed upon with the municipalities and the civil society of each country.

The creation and establishment of the juridical system that will facilitate a coherent decentralization process must include:

- ① A law of municipal civil service.
- ② A law for municipal financial administration.
- ③ A law for the establishment of local development councils.
- ④ A reconstruction and local development fund for training and local development that would finance projects for municipal strengthening and development. This fund should be established with central government funds, local funds and international cooperation contributions and should involve all actors in the administration of the funds. Specifically, it is suggested that debt conversion be used to fund this mechanism.
- ⑤ Creating and implementing a transfer of government funds to the municipalities, and increase these funds progressively. Legislate these allocations, including establishing objective distribution criteria to benefit the most vulnerable areas.
- ⑥ Establishing a mechanism of monitoring and evaluation that will report to civil society and donor organizations to verify the distribution of funds.
- ⑦ Integrating into the commission or coordinating bodies decentralization policies, the municipal associations and civil society of each country, to insure that conditions are created

to facilitate agreements on the evaluation of policies and strategies.

- 8 Revising and designing with a decentralization and participatory vision, national institutions that support and promote local development in the different countries of the region.
- 9 A process of territorial reorganization as a basis for the articulation of the local and regional development plans.

The specificity of each country should be taken into account when implementing these recommendations. A special reference is made to the decentralization of the autonomous regions of Nicaragua whose Autonomy Status must be implemented as a precedent for other similar situations in the region.

Recommendations on foreign debt, economic policies and structural adjustment policies:

Taking into account the overwhelming effect of foreign debt and debt service on the economy and its impact on the population of the region, we consider that this issue must be prioritized in the following way:

- 1 It is imperative that the funds freed up by debt relief (and the annual debt service relief) be invested in comprehensive, and sustainable human development giving priority to the most vulnerable sectors of the population. This is the case for both bilateral debt, multilateral and commercial debt.
- 2 A participatory process of designing and implementing structural adjustment programs, including the revision of the current economic model.
- 3 The international financial institutions must adopt a code of best practices, in order to have ongoing flow of information on these issues between governments, financial organizations and civil society.
- 4 A joint commission should be created between civil society and the government to monitor and audit in each country the process of debt reduction and future loans received by Central American governments.

All the above must be carried out in the context of the recognition that debt forgiveness is vital, and that debt forgiveness must be done in a way that generates resources for comprehensive and sustainable development.

Annex V.

The Stockholm Declaration

Hurricane Mitch that hit Central America in 1998 with devastating effects demonstrated the ecological and social vulnerability of the region. This natural disaster occurred when Central America had regained hope for a better future, after years of internal conflict, violence and deep economic crisis and has dedicated its efforts to the consolidation of peace, democracy and sustainable development.

Response from the international community was prompt and international concern was confirmed at the first meeting of the Consultative Group for the Reconstruction and transformation of Central America that took place at the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) Headquarters on 10-11 December 1998, in Washington D.C. The Presidents of Central America made clear their view of the tragedy as a unique opportunity to rebuild – not the same – but a better Central America. They reiterated their firm commitment to continue to consolidate peace and democracy in their countries, and to seek higher levels of equitable growth. The Presidents referred to the progress made towards sustainable development and affirmed their wish to reinforce the foundation of this development. The Presidents also reiterated their support to the process of regional integration.

At this second meeting of the Consultative Group, held in Stockholm 25-28 May 1999, the Governments of Central American and the International community have committed themselves to sharing the responsibility for achieving the reconstruction and the transformation of the countries concerned, thus establishing a long term partnership guided by the priorities defined by the Central American countries and based on the following goals and principles:

- ▶ Reduce the social and ecological vulnerability of the region, as the overriding goal.
- ▶ Reconstruct and transform Central America based on an integrated approach of transparency and good governance.

- ▶ Consolidate democracy and good governance, reinforcing the process of decentralization of governmental functions and powers, with the active participation of civil society.
- ▶ Promote respect for human rights as a permanent objective. The promotion of equality between women and men, the rights of children, of ethnic groups and other minorities should be given special attention.
- ▶ Coordinate donor efforts, guided by priorities set by the recipient countries of the region.

To respond to the magnitude of the challenge faced by this new partnership, the partners agreed to provide all parties with continuous follow up and information on progress in Central American Integration System (SC-SICA) to include regional progress as well. It is anticipated that international financial institutions and international organizations will support this process.

This Declaration reflects the mutual understanding reached at this second meeting of the Consultative Group and will provide invaluable guidance for common efforts for the reconstruction and transformation of Central America. The historical importance of this meeting is expressed by the high-level representation from both Central American Governments and the International community. With the challenges and prospects of the new Millennium ahead of us, we welcome this Declaration as a substantial support towards securing a better future for present and coming generations of the peoples of Central America.

Stockholm, 28 May 1999

Advocacy Training Organizations

The following is a list of organizations in the United States, Latin America and around the world that provide advocacy training workshops and/or offer useful materials and information on advocacy.

Advocacy Institute

The Advocacy Institute is a U.S.-based global organization dedicated to strengthening the capacity of political, social and economic justice advocates to influence and change public policy.

1629 K St., NW, Suite 200
Washington, DC 20006-1629
Tel: 202-777-7575
Fax: 202-777-7577

Website: www.advocacy.org
E-mail: info@advocacy.org

ALFORJA

ALFORJA is a network of 7 NGOs in Central America and Mexico, who coordinate and share their advocacy research, training methods and materials.

Apartado 1272-2050
San José, Costa Rica
Tel: +506-253-1015 / +506-280-6540
Fax: +506-253-7023

Website: www.alforja.org
E-mail: asistencia@alforja.ar.cr

CEASPA, Panamá

Centro de Estudios y Acción Social
Panameño
Apartado 6-133 / El Dorado, Panamá
Tel: 507-226-6602/6799

Fax: 507-226-5320
Website: <http://200.46.124.167>
E-mail: ceaspa@cwpanama.net

CEP, Costa Rica

Centro de Estudios y Publicaciones
Alforja

Apartado Postal 369-1000
San José, Costa Rica
Tel: 506-280-6540

Fax: 506-253-7023
Website: www.alforja.or.cr/centros/cep
E-mail: cep@alforja.or.cr

CANTERA, Nicaragua

Apartado Postal A-52
Managua, Nicaragua
Tel: 505-277-5329 / 278-0103
Fax: 505-278-0103

Website:
www.oneworld.org/cantera
E-mail: cantera@nicarao.org.ni

CENCOPH, Honduras

Centro de Comunicación Popular de
Honduras

Apartado Postal 1277
Tegucigalpa, Honduras
Tel: 504-238-5432

Fax: 504-238-5432
Website: www.alforja.or.cr/quees/centros/cencoph.shtml
E-mail: cencoph@sdnhon.org.hn

FUNPROCOOP, El Salvador

12 calle poniente, Colonia Flor Blanca, casa# 2422
05-112, CP 01-140
San Salvador, El Salvador, C.A.
Tel: 223-0453 / 223-9489
Fax: 224-2590
Website: www.alforja.or.cr/quees/centros/funpro.shtml
E-mail: cep@alforja.or.cr

SERJUS, Guatemala

Servicios Jurídicos y Sociales, S.C.
12 Calle 30-40, Zona 7 Colonia Tikal 1 Guatemala, Guatemala
Tel: 502-473-9157, 502-473-8662
Fax: 502-473-9865.
Website: www.alforja.or.cr/quees/centros/serjus.shtml
E-mail: serjus@intelnet.net.gt

IMDEC, México

Instituto Mexicano para el Desarrollo Comunitario, A.C.
Pino 2237-A, Col. del Fresno C.P. 44900 Guadalajara, Jal. México
Tel: 523-810-4536 / 811-0944
Fax: 523-811-0714
Website: www.imdec.net
E-mail: imdec@laneta.apc.org

American Friends Service Committee (AFSC)

The American Friends Service Committee (AFSC) is a Quaker organization working on issues related to economic justice, peace-building and demilitarization, social justice, and youth in the United States, as well as in Africa, Asia, Latin America, and the Middle East.
1501 Cherry Street
Philadelphia, PA 19102
Tel: 215-241-7000
Fax: 215-241-7275
Website: www.afsc.org
E-mail: afscinfo@afsc.org

Arias Foundation for Peace and Human Progress

The Arias Foundation for Peace and Human Progress is a Costa Rica-based foundation dedicated to promoting just and peaceful societies in Central America and abroad. The Foundation consists of three separate centers: the Center for Human Progress, the Center for Peace and Reconciliation, and the Center for Organized Participation.
Apartado 8-6410-1000
San José, Costa Rica
Tel: 506-255-2955
Fax: 506-255-2244
Website: www.arias.or.cr
E-mail: info@arias.or.cr

Asia Foundation

The Asia Foundation collaborates with partners from the public and private sectors to build leadership, improve policy and regulation, and strengthen institutions to foster greater openness and shared prosperity in the Asia Pacific region.
Headquarters
465 California Street, 14th Floor
San Francisco, CA 94104
Tel: 415- 982-4640
Fax: 415-392-8863
Website: www.asiafoundation.org
Email: info@asiafound.org
Washington, D.C.
1779 Massachusetts Avenue, NW, Suite 815
Washington, D.C. 20036
Tel: 202-588-9420
Fax: 202 588-9409
E-mail: info@dc.asiafound.org

Catholic Relief Services (CRS)

Catholic Relief Services gives assistance to people in more than 80 countries around the world. CRS has programs overseas, in the United States and with international Catholic networks to promote more just and socially responsible policies and practices.

209 West Fayette Street
Baltimore, MD 21201-3443
Tel: 410-625-2220 or 800-235-2772
Fax: 410-685-1635
Website: www.catholicrelief.org
E-mail: webmaster@catholicrelief.org

Centro de Investigación y Desarrollo de la Educación (CIDE)

El Centro de Investigación y Desarrollo de la Educación is a non-governmental, academic center established in 1964 in Chile. Through research, education and training, they work to promote participatory educational methods in an effort to strengthen the capacity of civil society to participate in the construction of a more equitable society.

Erasmus Escala 1825
Casilla Postal 13608, Santiago 21, Chile
Tel: +56 2 698-7153
Fax: +56 2 671-8051
Website: www.cide.cl
E-mail: cide@cide.cl

CEDPA

CEDPA is a women-focused nonprofit international organization founded in 1975. CEDPA's mission is to empower women at all levels of society to be full partners in development

The Centre for Development and Population Activities
1400 16th Street NW, Suite 100
Washington, D.C. 20036 USA
Tel: 202-667-1142
Fax: 202-332-4496
Website: www.cedpa.org
E-mail: cmail@cedpa.org

Creative Associates International (CAII)

Creative Associates International, Inc. (CAII) is a private professional and technical services firm. CAII assists governments, communities and businesses through its three program areas: Communities in Transition; Management, Education; Mobilization and Communication; and Analysis and Management.

5301 Wisconsin Avenue, N.W., Suite 700
Washington, D.C. 20015
Tel: + 1 202 966 5804
Fax: +1 202 363 4771
Website: www.caii-dc.com
E-mail: creative@caii-dc.com

Instituto para el Desarrollo de la Democracia Participativa (IDEPA)

The Institute for the Development of the Participative Democracy is a non-governmental organization in Argentina, founded in 1998. IDEPA promotes the strengthening of civil society and its democratic participation in political parties, local governments and non-governmental organizations, in order to contribute to the development of freedom and democracy.

Buenos Aires, República Argentina
Tel/Fax: +54 011-42 45 1755
Website: www.idepa.org.ar
E-mail: correo@idepa.org.ar

Institute for Development Research (IDR)

The Institute for Development Research (IDR), is a nonprofit research, education and consulting organization dedicated to increasing the capacity of civil society groups to advance just and sustainable development.

44 Farnsworth Street
Boston, Massachusetts 02210-1211 USA
Tel: 617-422-0422
Fax: 617-482-0617
Website: www.jsi.com.idr
E-mail: idr@jsi.com

InterAction

A U.S. coalition of more than 165 non-profit organizations working worldwide and in the U.S. to promote sustainable development, refugee and disaster assistance and humanitarian aid.

1717 Massachusetts Ave., N.W.,
Suite 701
Washington, DC 20036
Tel: 202-667-8227
Fax: 202-667-8236
Website: www.interaction.org
E-mail: ia@interaction.org

Lutheran World Federation (LWF)

The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) is a global communion of Christian churches in the Lutheran tradition. LWF's

Department of World Service operates service programs in 21 countries with 60 international staff and 5,600 local staff. Its work includes environment, human rights, landmines, refugees, training, evaluation, development education and migration and resettlement.

150, route de Ferney
P.O. Box 2100
CH-1211 Geneva 2
Switzerland
Tel: +41/22-791 61 11
Fax: +41/22-791 66 30
Website: www.lutheranworld.org
E-mail: info@lutheranworld.org

Oxfam America

Oxfam America is dedicated to creating lasting solutions to hunger, poverty, and social injustice through long-term partnerships with poor communities around the world. As a privately funded organization, Oxfam America challenges the structural barriers that foster conflict and human suffering and limit people from gaining the skills, resources, and power to become self-sufficient.

1112 16th St., NW, Suite 600
Washington, DC 20036
Tel: 202-496-1180
Fax: 202-496-1190
Website: www.oxfamamerica.org
Email: info@oxfamamerica.org

Oxfam International

Oxfam International is an international group of 11 non-government organizations working to end poverty both in longer-term development work and in times of urgent humanitarian need. The Oxfam International Advocacy Office co-ordinates the development of joint strategies and policies for all its members and for partners in the South.

Oxfam International Advocacy
Advocacy Director: Phil Twyford
Office Address: 1112 16th St., NW,
Suite 600, Washington DC 20036, USA
Tel: ++ 1 202-496-1170
Fax: ++ 1 202-496-0128
Website: www.oxfaminternational.org
E-mail: advocacy@oxfaminternational.org

Women, Law and Development International

Women, Law and Development

International (WLDI) is a non-profit women's human rights organization.

1350 Connecticut Ave, NW, Suite 1100
Washington, DC 20036
Tel: +1 202-463-7477
Fax: +1 202-463-7480
Website: www.wld.org
E-mail: wld@wld.org

WOLA Publications and Advocacy Training Materials

Memoria de la Reunión Regional sobre Incidencia en Centroamérica, Octubre 13 y 14 del 2000, Antigua, Guatemala.

A meeting of more than 30 organizations that fund or provide training and accompaniment to advocacy initiatives in Central America organized by CEDPA, Creative Associates International of El Salvador (CAII) and WOLA. Only available in Spanish.

- ▶ Memoria de la Reunión Regional sobre Incidencia
- ▶ Tabla 1: Formación y Capacitación en Incidencia por Tema
- ▶ Tabla 2: Formación y Capacitación en Incidencia por Sector
- ▶ Tabla 3: Elaboración de Materiales Didácticos
- ▶ Tabla 4: Investigación y Sistematización de Experiencias de Iniciativas de Incidencia
- ▶ Tabla 5: Investigación y Elaboración de Material Informativo
- ▶ Tabla 6: Asesoría Técnica y Acompañamiento en Acciones Concretas
- ▶ Tabla 7: Otras Actividades

11/00 *Free*

Participación Ciudadana: Un Reto para el Nuevo Milenio en Centroamérica. Enlace.

09/00 *Free*

Effective Citizen Participation in Central America.

09/00 *Free*

Memoria del Encuentro Centroamericano—Experiencias de Incidencia Política: Normas Jurídicas sobre Violencia Contra la Mujer. Only available in Spanish.

11/98

La Planificación Participativa para la Incidencia Política: Una Guía Práctica

An introductory guide to the 8 critical steps in carrying out an advocacy campaign. Only available in Spanish. Click here to download a free copy.

09/99 \$5.00

Advocacy Worksheets:

- ▶ Worksheet 1: Participación Participativa para la Incidencia Política: Resumen de la Metodología de WOLA
- ▶ Worksheet 2: Análisis de Intereses de Blancos
- ▶ Worksheet 3: Uso de Información e Investigación
- ▶ Worksheet 4: Análisis de Poder
- ▶ Worksheet 5: Puntos de Hablar con Actores Claves
Only available in Spanish.

Free

La incidencia Política: Herramienta para el Cambio en una Sociedad Democrática.

A poster which illustrates the 8 critical steps in carrying out an advocacy campaign. Only available in Spanish.

09/99

Training Materials from Other Organizations

CEDPA:

- 1999 Manual para la Incidencia Política “Defensa y Promoción: Fortaleciendo la Capacidad de las Líderes de ONG.” CEDPA.

Fundación Arias para la Paz y el Progreso Humano:

- 1997 Diagnóstico Sobre la Incidencia en Centro América: Proyecto “La Formación de una Cultura Democrática en Centroamérica El Papel Socializador de las ONGs” Fundación Arias para la Paz y el Progreso Humano.
- 1997 Memoria del Taller Regional de Capacitación en Incidencia: Proyecto “La Formación de una Cultura Democrática en Centroamérica El Papel Socializador de las ONGs.” Fundación Arias para la Paz y el Progreso Humano.
- 1997 Rescate del Plan de Reconstrucción Nacional “Un Caso de Incidencia: El Salvador.” Fundación Arias para la Paz y el Progreso Humano and the Fundación para el Desarrollo.
- 1997 Aprobación del Código de la Niñez y la Adolescencia “Un Caso de Incidencia: Honduras”. Fundación Arias para la Paz y el Progreso Humano and the Centro de Investigación y Promoción de los Derechos Humanos.
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